THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

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Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Port of Intrigue
by F. VAN WYCK MASON

Death in the Valley
by CLIFFORD KNIGHT

The Crime in Nobody's Room
by CARTER DICKSON

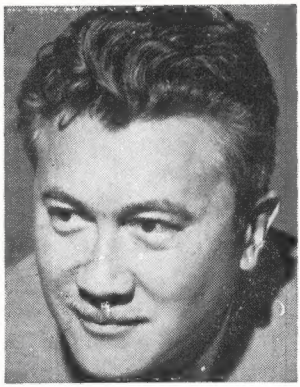
The One Eyed Engineer
by GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

The Export Trade
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

MURDER TO MUSIC
A SHORT NOVEL by FREDRIC BROWN

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



WHEN the bard gave out that "Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast," he was of course thinking of the pure and simple melodies and harmonies which were all that had impinged on the European ear up to that time. He had not been exposed to the variations of Arnold Schoenberg or Eddie Condon, let alone Elvis Presley.

But even in those days musicians as a class were considered a basically goofy lot, a belief which has not changed much with the passing years. To the layman, or square, they are still alien creatures with a badge of long hair, though the cut may have degenerated from noble mane to duck-tail, addicted to wearing eccentric clothes and smoking marijuana, and speaking a weird jargon of their own which changes its vocabulary so fast that anyone who lost touch with it for a couple of years would find it almost as unintelligible as Swahili. And the fact that a couple of my own good friends are musicians of note who look absolutely human will probably impress none of you.

So into a small corner of this downbeat world as you would prefer it, we feature this month a guided tour by Professor Fredric Brown, in the form of a first-rate new novelet suitably entitled MURDER TO MUSIC.

Just to make this a really tuneful issue, we're counterpointing that with a title that inevitably brings to mind a very different kind of music. CALYPSONIAN is our exciting new discovery of the month; and you can be satisfied that you never read anything more authentic, for author Samuel Selvon, though working here now on a Guggenheim fellowship, is Trinidad-born and bred.

Knowing that I hardly need to recommend Van Wyck Mason or repeat that Carter Dickson is still my nominee for the greatest of all puzzlers, I'm still short of space to say all I'd like to about our new stories by Clifford Knight, Veronica Parker Johns, and the first one we've had from J. Francis McComas, yet another distinguished wanderer from the science-fiction orbit. At least I can save my comments on the Saint story, THE EXPORT TRADE, till you get to it in the next couple of pages.

But this is a cool number, cats.

Leon Charleus

Paul Harvey Hails New Way For Deaf To Hear Clearly Again

NEW YORK CITY (Special)—A sensational new discovery in the miracle science of electronics that helps the hard-of-hearing hear clearly again was hailed by Paul Harvey, famous news commentator, on his American Broadcasting Co. broadcast Sunday night.

Harvey revealed that this new discovery helps even those suffering a severe hearing loss to hear again with unbelievable clearness. It is so revolutionary it makes vacuum-tube hearing aids obsolete. Nothing shows in the ear except a tiny, almost invisible device.

"This new invention changes the lives of the hard-of-hearing overnight," Harvey said. "I've seen it happen to someone I know intimately."

Harvey urged his listeners to find out how this amazing discovery can bring new happiness and success to their loved ones who need better hearing.

To acquaint readers of this magazine with this new way to hear clearly again, a fascinating book with complete facts will be sent free, in a plain wrapper. No cost or obligation. Send your request on a postcard to Electronic Research Director, Dept. LH-2, Beltone Hearing Aid Co 31 West 47 Street, New York 36, New York.

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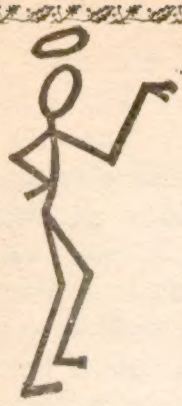

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murder to music

by . . . Fredric Brown

"We're still not going to get anywhere unless your friend decides to level with us. If a man gets beat up on purpose, he knows why it happened all right."

IT STARTED on a Tuesday evening in early October. It had been a fine evening, up to then. I'd made a good sale and when the phone rang I guessed that it was Danny and was glad he'd called so I'd have a chance to tell him about it.

Danny Bushman and I run a used car lot together. My name is Ralph Oliver. Danny and I have been close friends since we started high school together. He played trumpet and I played sax and we played together in the high school band and orchestra, and in our junior and senior years we made our spending money playing at parties and dances.

After graduation we were apart for a year. Danny got a few thousand bucks from his father's life insurance — his mother had died before he entered high school—and he threw it into starting a small but hot dance band, which he called *The Bushmen,* from his own name which, in case you've forgotten already, was Bushman.

Fredric Brown, author of THE LENIENT BEAST, *discussed in these pages recently, and of many other novels, is without a doubt one of the best known writers in this field. Distinguished for his sensitive portraits of the disturbed-in-mind, Fredric Brown is a superb chronicler of mores and urges just off Main Street and over behind the Main Line.* MURDER TO MUSIC, *demonstrating his versatility, is a study in murder, set against an unusual and vivid background.*

He wanted me to go with him on it, but I had other ideas. I enrolled as a student at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music. Both of my parents had died by then too (funny how many parallels there have been in Danny's life and mine, in big things as well as little ones) but I figured I could work my way through by playing evenings. I found that I could, but I also found within a year that longhair, although not for the birds was not for me either, and I quit. And in just the same length of time Danny found out that he was a better trumpet player than a band leader and *The Bushmen,* as Danny put it, went back to the bushes.

For the next ten years we blew for our bread and butter, and managed most of the time to stick together. If not in the same band, at least in bands in the same city.

Something happened then that might have broken up our friendship, but only showed how strong it was. We both fell in love with the same girl, Doris Dennis, who was a singer with Tommy Drum's orchestra, with which both Danny and I were playing at the time. She liked both of us but Danny was the one she fell for. They were married, and still we were friends. All three of us, in fact.

A few months later, Tommy Drum got behind the eight ball and had to break up the orchestra. Almost any musician who's really good, and Tommy Drum was, tries his hand as an orchestra leader once; few of them are businessmen enough to make a go of it.

Danny and I, with Doris kibitzing, had a conference to decide what band might be able to take both of us on, and ended up deciding, with Doris abetting, that we were getting a little old for the game. Most dance musicians quit and get into something else by the time they're thirty, and that's how old we were. And we both happened to be solvent enough for it to be a good time for us to make the break. We'd all been working steadily for quite a while and I had a fairish sum salted. Danny had somewhat less, mostly because he had a weakness for the ponies, but Doris had some savings and wanted to advance Danny enough to make his share match mine, if we could find a good place to put it.

We kicked it around, and the only thing we both knew and liked besides music was cars. So we ended up with a used car lot. Back in the small city Danny and I had come from.

That was almost a year ago, and we were beginning to do all right. At least we were out of the red and into the black, and we made money when we had a good day. A good day is

one when we make two good sales of relatively late model cars; one sale gets us off the nut and a second one is gravy.

It was a quarter of nine when Danny phoned and I was just getting ready to shut up shop. We keep open from nine to nine, with Danny opening the lot in the morning and quitting at dinner time and with me starting after lunch and working till closing, which puts two of us on the lot during the afternoon and one each mornings and evenings. Danny said, "Hi, Ralph. How goes it?"

"Crazy," I told him. "I sold the fifty-three Buick."

"Attaboy. Full price?"

"Full price, except that for cash I promised him four new tires. It's still a good deal."

"I'm flipping," he said. "But I got some good news too. Guess who's in town?"

"I'll bite. Who? Eisenhower?"

"Better than that. Tommy Drum. He's got a cool combo, and they're opening tonight at the Casanova Club. Need I say more?"

"Did you make reservations?"

"For three. Only you'll have to pick me up and take me there. Doris is at a hen party and she took my heap, so I'm afoot. But I phoned her and she'll join us as soon as her party breaks up, probably around eleven. Can you come right here, or will you have to go home first?"

"I'll come right there. I can wash up and shave there and bum a clean shirt. The rest of my clothes will do."

"Hit it, man. My pad is panting."

We don't ordinarily talk that way, but it came natural to go back to the jive when we were going to see Tommy again and dig his combo. It could be good if he had the right support. Tommy Drum, despite his name, plays a very cool piano.

It took me ten or fifteen minutes to put the lot to sleep and to climb aboard the old Merc I use for my own transportation—although when I'm on the lot it's there too, in case anybody wants to buy it—and another fifteen or twenty to Danny's "pad." He and Doris have a small apartment on the north side. Neat but not gaudy. It's in a small building, only four apartments, two on each floor, and the Bushmans' is the downstairs one on the left.

I tried the knob first, thinking Danny would probably have left it unlocked so I could walk right in, and was surprised when the door wouldn't open. I knocked, and then again and louder.

There was only silence on the other side. Could Danny have dozed off? Hardly, and besides he was a light sleeper; even my first light knock would have wakened him. It didn't make sense, that silence. Expecting me

any minute, he wouldn't have gone out anywhere.

It had been minutes now, and I began to get worried. Anywhere in that small apartment he must have heard me. But I tried again and still harder, and called out his name.

This got me open the door on the other side of the hall, and a man with rumpled gray hair looking at me through the doorway. I'd been introduced to him once—but didn't remember his name—as a neighbor of the Bushmans. He said, "Oh—it's you," so he recognized me too, and then, "Is something wrong?"

I said, "I know Danny's home—he must be. But—"

He stared at me. "You know," he said, "I thought I heard a kind of a thud across there a little while ago. If you think—These locks are awfully flimsy. I think together we could—"

But already I'd thrown my weight against the door, and he was right about the lock; it broke and the door flew open on my first lunge.

Danny, fully dressed except for his suit coat, lay stretched, spread-eagled, on the living room rug with his feet toward the door. I ran to him and bent over him, fumbling to open his shirt at the collar to give him air and farther down to reach in and feel for a heartbeat. The neighbor had come as far as the doorway and I yelled over my shoulder to him to phone for an ambulance. I said a police ambulance because I thought it would get us faster service whatever this was, whatever had happened. And I thought I knew because his otherwise spotless white shirt was dirty just where it would have been dirtied by someone giving him a few kicks after knocking him out. It looked like a going-over.

His heart was okay. I ran to the bathroom and wet a washrag with cold water. I had his head in my lap and was using it on his forehead when the neighbor came back. He said, "They're coming. Is he—all right?"

"He's alive. I think he's been beaten up." Danny was moaning a little now, beginning to come around.

"Is there anything I can—?"

I said, "There's brandy in the cabinet over the kitchen sink. Bring some."

He brought the bottle, a pint about half full. He took the cap off and handed it to me. Danny's eyes were open now, but a bit glazed. His lips opened, though, when I held the mouth of the bottle against them, and he gulped and shuddered when I raised the bottle enough to give him a good sized slug.

Then he tried weakly to sit up but I held him back lightly by a shoulder. I said, "Take it easy, kid. There's an ambulance coming and you'd better lie still.

You might have something broken."

Two uniformed cops were coming in the doorway. From a radio car, we learned later, that had happened to be cruising only a few blocks away when they'd got the message.

I beat them to the punch by asking if an ambulance was coming.

"Yeah," one of them said. "What's up?"

"A beating, I think," I told him. Danny tried to say something but I shushed him. "Wait for some strength, Danny. Let us tell our stories first; they're simpler."

But we all three had time to tell our stories before the ambulance came and Danny's was as simple to tell as ours. Or simpler. A few minutes after talking to me on the phone he'd been going to the door to unlock it so I could let myself in when I came, and there was a knock on the door before he reached it. Danny's first reaction had been that he'd misjudged the time and that I was here already and he'd thrown the door wide open. A big man with a handkerchief tied over his face and a hat pulled down over his eyes stepped through the doorway and had swung a right at Danny's jaw that Danny had barely seen coming and didn't have time even to try to duck. And that was the last thing he remembered until he came to, with his head in my lap.

Did he know the guy? No, and he wouldn't be able to identify him if he saw him again. A big guy, maybe six feet and at least a couple of hundred pounds, and that was all the description he could give. Danny thought he wore a brown suit but he wasn't even sure of that. There'd probably been quite literally only a second between the time he'd opened the door and the time he'd gone down and out.

And no, he didn't have any enemies that he knew of and didn't have the faintest idea what it was all about. Either the guy was crazy or it was a case of mistaken identity and he thought he was beating up somebody else.

Danny kept saying he was okay and trying to sit up, but I told him for all we knew he could have some broken ribs and we didn't want one puncturing a lung. When the ambulance came, they were gentle about getting him on the stretcher.

I rode with him to the emergency hospital, but we didn't talk much on the ride. Danny said that from the hospital I'd better get to the Casanova Club fast to be sure of being there in time to meet Doris; she'd be worried if she got there first and didn't find either of us. I said okay, but it was still only half past nine; there was lots of time

and I'd wait until they'd at least have given him a quick once over. So that, if there wasn't anything serious—and we were both beginning to think there wasn't—I could reassure Doris and not frighten her.

It didn't take long, once we got there. I was in the waiting room only twenty minutes when a doctor came in and gave me the news: nothing broken, nothing seriously wrong.

Danny was going to have a sore jaw and some sore ribs, a few bruises other places, but nothing worse. As far as the hospital was concerned he could be released right away, if he felt up to going home, although the doctor advised him to lie quietly and rest another half hour or so before leaving.

"You say as far as the hospital is concerned," I said. "What else?"

"The police," he said. "They are sending a detective around to talk to him."

They let me in to talk to Danny again. They'd stripped him for the examination and he was getting his clothes back on, a bit painfully. He said, "Listen, Ralph, I'm stuck here till some dick comes to grill me, but maybe I can still get to the Casanova before Doris does. And if so, don't say anything—"

"Nuts," I said. "You can't keep this from Doris. It may or may not make the papers, but you're going to be a lot sorer tomorrow morning when you wake up than you are right now. You'll probably need help to get dressed. And your jaw will probably be too sore to chew toast for breakfast. You'll have to tell her *something* and it might as well be the truth. Why not?"

He saw that, and gave in, provided I'd play it down instead of up if I had to be the one to tell her.

I caught a cab from the hospital back to his place to get the Merc, and it was ten o'clock by the time I got it. The Casanova's well west of town, about an hour's drive, but I drove fast and made it well before eleven. I thought ruefully about how much cab fare was going to cost Danny, but there wasn't any out on that.

The joint was jumping. It was a good thing Danny had phoned and reserved a table. Even so, it was a lousy table for our purpose; the room was L-shaped and this one was around the corner and out of sight of the bandstand. No doubt we'd be able to get ourselves a better one later, though; the people who had come mostly for dinner would be starting to leave now.

So I took the table without argument and ordered myself a highball. It might be amusing to listen to the combo before I saw it, to see if I could guess who Tommy Drum had with

him. Tommy's piano I'd have known anywhere. The sax was not quite up to it, and I couldn't place it; it could have been any one of a hundred tenor saxes. Smooth tone and no goofing, but weak on improvisation; Tommy's piano could lead him just so far out but no farther. But it was adequate and it was something the squares could dig. The skins were much better but I didn't place the drummer until he took a solo and started to go to town—but in a civilized way—on the Chinese cymbal. It was Frank Ritchie; I'd never played with him but I knew him and had heard him often, always with combos. He was a combo man and didn't like band work. He was right in his element with Tommy; it could have been a great combo with a better sax.

Well, I'd identified the drummer and I'd given up on the sax so I left my half-finished drink on the table and strolled out to where I could see the bandstand. I knew the sax after all, although not well. It was Mick O'Neill, a guy Danny and I had played with two or three times for short periods. Danny had never liked him, had almost had a fight with him once, but I got along okay with him. Mick had got his start in New Orleans and he was strictly a Dixieland man; he was good at that but way over his head in the kind of stuff Tommy Drum was playing tonight. I wondered why Tommy had picked him.

A hand touched my sleeve and a voice said, "Hi, Oliver. Sit down." I looked down and saw it was Max Stivers. Bookmaker and racketeer, I'd heard. I'd met him around a few places.

He said, "This is Gino Itule," and nodded to his companion. "Gino, Ralph Oliver." And I reached across and shook hands with a man built like a beer barrel.

"Sit down," Stivers repeated. "Saw the lousy table they gave you. You can't see from there."

I slid into the vacant seat beside him. "Thanks," I said. "Until somebody I'm expecting shows up." I looked around for a waiter. "I'll have my drink brought over."

"Forget it," Stivers said. "I'll get you a fresh one." He reached a hand in the air and snapped his fingers and suddenly we had not one but three waiters coming toward us. I ordered a rye and soda from one of them and grinned at Stivers. "Real service you get."

"I should. I own a piece of the joint. Say, you're an ex-musician, aren't you? What do you think of the combo that's starting tonight?"

"Came to catch them; they're old friends of mine. So my opinion would be prejudiced."

When the waiter brought my drink it occurred to me that now,

while I was sitting with the owner of a piece of the joint, would be a good time to start pushing for a better table, but Stivers stopped me and waved the waiter away. He said, "Take this table. Gino and I are leaving in a minute. And it's bigger; your friends in the band will probably want to join you when they take a break."

That solved that and I thanked him. Racketeers may not be nice people but they're nice people to know, when they're on your side.

They left a minute later and a minute after that Tommy Drum looked my way and I caught his eye and waved. He didn't wave back or even nod, but his music went into a tricky little phrase that had once been a joke between us. And a few minutes later he ended the number and came over to my table.

I stuck out my hand and said it was swell to see him again.

"Crazy," he said, grinning ear to ear. "How goes the filling station?"

"Used car lot. It goes, somewhat. How goes the combo?"

"You heard it," he said. He shook his head sadly. "My kingdom for a saxophone. You don't want a job again, do you, Ralph?"

"Off it for good, Tommy. I'm a car salesman now, and a businessman. Maybe there isn't much dough in it yet, but we're building it up; we'll get there."

"Just evenings, just while we're booked here—a month. You can put in some time on the lot days."

I shook my head. "Sorry, Tommy, but it's out. But what gives? How come you hired Mick? You know he's a Dixie boy."

"Do I, do I? It's a long sad, Ralph. Wingy Tyler's blowing for me—one of the best in the business, short of the real top boys I couldn't afford. Man, can that cat blow. And this morning, two hours or so before plane time for our booking here, he goofs on me. Know what he does, like?"

"What does he do, like?"

"Ruptures his appendix, that's all. Well, the operation went fine; we couldn't wait but I had the doc send me a telegram. But Wingy's out for the month we're booked here. So there I am in Pittsburg, two hours to plane time, and I run into Mick just when I think I'm going to have to cancel. He says he's going west anyway so he'll come along for the ride and fill in till I get somebody. It's fine with Mick the minute I replace him—you won't be undercutting him. Nohow, Jackson."

He lighted a cigarette for me that I'd just stuck in my mouth. "Think it over, anyway. Talk to Danny about it; *he'll* tell you

not to let an old man down. Where is he?"

"Coming later. So's Doris."

"Crazy. Why don't you people stay home, though? Found both you and Danny in the fun book, and kept calling first one number then the other till I finally got Danny at half past eight."

"You should have called the lot; we were both there all afternoon."

"I looked for it, but I looked under filling stations." He glanced at his watch and got up quickly. "Back to the mountain," he said. "This is supposed to be in the middle of a set, so that's why I told the other boys to stay up there. We'll all be over later. Hasta banana."

I looked at my watch too, wondering about Doris. It was almost half past eleven. Well, half an hour isn't late for a woman.

Danny came in a few minutes later. There was a stocky middle aged man with him and if the man wasn't a cop then he was disguised as one; he wore a shiny blue serge suit, carried a soft black felt hat that the check girl hadn't been able to take away from him, and wore the first pair of high shoes I'd seen in a long time. He had a round face and sad eyes.

Danny introduced him as Lieutenant Andrews.

Danny grinned at me. "I persuaded him to third-degree me while driving me out here. Look at the cab fare I saved."

"He didn't have to talk me into it," Andrews said. "I wanted to talk to you, and to Drum. He's the one playing piano by there, isn't he?"

I nodded, but I asked, "Why to him? He couldn't have had anything to do with what happened to Danny."

He gave me a level look. "Then you know all about what happened to your partner?"

"Of course not. But I see what you mean." I happened to look toward the entrance and I said, "Here comes Doris. Listen, Lieutenant, how's about you and me strolling over to the bar for a few minutes. You want to question me anyway, and that'll give Danny a chance to tell his wife what happened without—well, it would worry her more if there's a cop with him when he has to tell it."

He nodded and we stood up. That's when Doris caught sight of us and I waved to her and pointed to Danny still seated, and Andrews and I started toward the bar. But halfway there he took me by the arm and started steering at right angles. "Let's go out on the terrace instead. I don't drink on duty and besides the bar's pretty crowded."

It was all right by me, and we went out into the cool darkness and sat down on a concrete

railing. We could hear the music from here and I heard Mick O'Neill start what might have been a far out wail and then suddenly butter a large ear of corn; I winced.

"All right," Andrews said. "Tell it your way, what happened."

I told it my way and he listened without interrupting.

When I'd finished, he asked, "How sure are you it was a quarter to nine when Mr. Bushman phoned you?"

"Within a minute or two. I'd just looked at my watch, wondering how soon I could start turning out lights and closing up."

"I guess it checks," he said. "Mr. Bushman happened to notice the time when he got a call from Mr. Drum, half past eight. He didn't notice any times after that, but the first thing he did was to call the club here for a reservation and—"

"Why didn't he ask Tommy to take care of it? Simpler."

"Says he didn't think of it until they'd hung up. Anyway, then he phoned his wife at the party she was attending, a baby shower, and then called you. That would make it a quarter of nine by the time he called you, as near as matters."

"As near as matters, but what does it matter?"

"Just trying to reconstruct things. Maybe the exact timing doesn't matter. Neighbor across the hall was watching television when he heard that thud. Thinks it was about the middle of the second half, after the midway commercial break, of a half hour dramatic show he was watching. That would put it between, say, ten minutes of nine and five of nine. Could you have driven from the lot to the Bushmans' place in five or ten minutes?"

"Ten minutes maybe, if I went pretty fast. But I didn't. I closed up the lot first and that took till almost nine. Then, since I didn't speed, it must have taken me at least fifteen minutes more to get out there. But why? You don't think *I* slugged Danny?"

"No, I don't," he said mildly. "Just not overlooking the possibility. After all, you're about six feet tall and two hundred pounds, like he described the man who hit him. And you're wearing a brownish suit and I'll bet you've got a handkerchief."

I had to laugh. I said, "Put on the cuffs, Lieutenant. You've got me cold. But tell me why I did it?"

"His wife, maybe. You were both in love with her once and maybe you both still are. Mr. Bushman told me that—I mean the fact that you both *were* in love with her—when he was telling me how close friends the two of you were. But what if you never gave up?"

I said, "I did give up, but even if I hadn't, what would beating up Danny do me toward taking his wife away from him? That's nutty, Lieutenant."

He sighed. "I guess it is. Does your friend have any enemies that you know of?"

"None that I know of and a buck gets you twenty he hasn't any that I don't know of. A few guys who don't like him too well, maybe, back in the old days—all musicians aren't one big happy family, sometimes we get in one another's hair—but nobody who'd still be carrying a grudge."

"Uh-huh. Does he gamble?"

"Nope. Used to a little, just small horse bets, when we were playing, but he's a reformed character now. We both are."

"Yeah? What are you reformed from?"

"Knocking out my friends and kicking them in the ribs," I told him.

He sighed again. "Well, thanks. Guess I had that coming. Shall we go back?"

When we got inside I saw that the combo had apparently finished the set because all three of them were at the table with Danny and Doris. I wondered for a second if Danny had had time to tell Doris what had happened, then realized he must have had because the combo had played two numbers after Andrews and I had gone out on the terrace.

I stopped Andrews just inside. I said, "Listen, Lieutenant, this is a family reunion, people who haven't seen one another for over a year. If you go asking questions at the table, you'll be a spectre at the feast. How about making that corner of the terrace your office and talking one at a time to whoever you want to talk to, like you did with me?"

"Son, I'm tired," he said. And seeing him so closely in the bright light I saw now that his face did look tired, and older than I'd thought at first. "And it's way past my quitting time. Yes, I'll want to talk to everybody there, but I think it can safely wait till tomorrow."

"Good," I said. "That's best all around."

"Yeah. I don't think there's any more danger. The goon who beat your friend up had him down and out; he could've hurt him worse if he wanted to, so why would he come back for more? But I got one more question for you and the fact that I forgot to ask it out there shows my brain is through working for the night."

"Shoot," I said.

"Could your friend by any chance be playing around on the side with a woman who might have a jealous husband or lover?"

"No," I said. "That's one vice

Danny hasn't got. And believe me, we're close enough that I'd know it if he was doing any philandering. I'd guess it before Doris would."

"You sound sure. All right, I'll buy it. Thanks, Son, and goodnight."

I went back to the table, said hi to Doris and shook hands with Frank Ritchie and Mick. Danny gave me a raised eyebrow and I knew he was wondering what had happened to the cop, so I leaned over and told him.

And that was an end to serious discussion for a while. For the next half hour it was musicians' talk and old home week and a ball. Then the combo had to climb the mountain for another set, and as soon as Tommy started tickling the keys, Doris looked at Danny, "Mind if I dance one with Ralph?"

Danny grinned at her. "You don't really want to dance with him, Honey. You just want a chance to pump him to find out if I told all. Go ahead."

When we were out on the floor dancing, Doris said, "Danny was right, Ralph. I do want to pump you."

"Sorry I'm such a lousy dancer."

"Don't be foolish. You know you're a wonderful dancer or you wouldn't say that. But about Danny—he's not playing this down, is he? I mean, about how badly he got hurt."

"Only some bruises, Doris. That's the McCoy because I got it straight from the doc, not roundabout. But he may be pretty sore in the morning and maybe he shouldn't open the lot. Tell you what, I'll phone around breakfast time and if he doesn't feel up to it, I'll get to the lot at nine. And if he doesn't feel up to coming in later, it won't hurt me to work the whole twelve hours for once."

"That's sweet of you, Ralph. Do you have any idea who might have done it to him or why?"

"Not a glimmer. Like Danny said when we were talking to the squad car cops, it could have been mistaken identity. Which, in that case, would mean the guy was a professional goon sent to beat up someone he didn't know and knocked on the wrong door or got the wrong building. Either that or the guy was a nut."

"But if he's *that,* what if he comes back again?"

I reassured her on that by repeating the lieutenant's reasoning, that the man had had Danny down and out and if he'd wanted to hurt him any worse, he could have done so there and then, without taking the added risk of making a second trip.

Then to change the subject I asked her if the dress she was wearing was a new one. It was a strapless black velvet that set off her page boy blonde hair

beautifully, and I was sure I'd never seen her wear it before.

She leaned back against my arm and laughed up at me. "It's borrowed, Ralph. You don't think I wore an evening gown to a baby shower, do you? After the shower I explained to Winnie what my phone call had been about, and she loaned me this." She added a little wistfully, "It *is* gorgeous."

That was all there was to say and we danced just one number.

We'd scarcely got back to the table when Mick O'Neill came over from the bandstand. He put a hand on my shoulder. "How about sitting in for a number, Ralph boy? Use my sax. I just wiped the mouthpiece and put in a new reed for you."

He slid into a chair. I hesitated and he grinned at me. "G'wan, man, I don't care if you show me up. Ride it high and funky."

Doris put her hand on my arm and said, "Go ahead, Ralph," so I nodded and climbed the mountain. Tommy said, "Hi, man. You name it." "You name it," I said, "and start it. But let me wet this reed first." I wetted the reed and blew a few soft arpeggios, and then nodded.

"All right, *Body*," Tommy said. I'll take an eight-bar intro and you come in." He swung into a smooth introduction to *Body and Soul,* and we were off.

I took my first chorus reasonably straight, and then started out, not far out but getting farther. Tommy, grinning, gave me a modulation into a new key and a swinging beat, and I found myself and blew. Way out and knowing I'd get back. Tommy looked around at me. "Dig that crazy tenor man," he said. And it sounded good and felt better than it sounded.

Then, when I laid off for thirty-two to give Frank a solo on the skins I looked toward our table and Danny was sitting there alone, and looking beyond I saw Mick dancing with Doris. I hoped Danny wasn't working up a peeve over that. Not that he minds other men dancing with Doris, but it might be different with Mick if Danny still had a grudge against him. But it was probably all right, I told myself, Danny wouldn't hold a grudge that long; it had been three years ago he'd almost had that fight with Mick. I couldn't remember now what it had been about, and like as not Danny wouldn't remember either.

At the end of the number, Tommy tried to talk me into finishing the set; I told him no, but that I'd be out again within a few days and next time I came I'd bring my own sax and I'd sit in a full set, maybe more.

So I went back to the table and sent Mick, who'd just returned Doris to Danny, back to

the combo. Danny said, "Nice going, Ralph," and Doris said "Cool," and I tried to blush modestly.

Danny leaned toward me. He said, "Mick was telling me about Tommy wanting you to join the combo. Why don't you, Ralph? Just while they're playing here, I mean. We could work it out."

"No, Danny," I said. "Remember our promise; we're through blowing for money. Jamming or sitting in, sure. But once one or both of us starts taking jobs on the side, the lot goes downhill. We talked that out and made it definite."

"But this is different. Tommy's a friend of ours and he *needs* a sax. We can't let a friend down. If we trade shifts on the lot so I work evenings—"

I said, "If Tommy was really in a jam, it might be different. But Mick agreed to stick with him till he gets somebody else. And how many in a crowd like this one know the difference? One in thirty, maybe; Tommy isn't going to lose his booking."

Danny shrugged. "If that's the way you feel about it, okay." Which surprised me a little; I'd expected him to give me more of an argument and if he had, who knows? Maybe I'd have let myself be talked into it. You've got to have principles in business, but that doesn't mean you can't weaken a little *once* in a while.

Doris said, "Ralph's right, Danny. You're going to make a go of that business, but only if you both stick to it tight and don't go goofing off."

And that ended any chance of my being talked into playing with Tommy; I'd look like a fool now if I changed my mind.

We had another round of drinks and Danny danced a couple of numbers with Doris and I danced one, and when I brought her back to the table Danny was stifling a yawn.

"Chillun," he said, "I better go. I'm the one that gets up early, and it's pushing midnight and an hour's drive from home."

I told him he was going to be sore in the morning and should let me open up for a change, but he insisted that he'd be all right. But he went along with the idea when I said I'd arranged with Doris to phone at breakfast time to make sure he felt up to working.

He told Doris she could stay and come in with me if she wanted to, but she vetoed that. He asked me to explain things to the boys so they wouldn't have to go over to the bandstand and to say good night for them. "If this was a one-night stand," he said, "I'd buck up and stick around. But they'll be here a month; we'll be out often."

"Okay," I told them, "scram before they finish this number, then, because it's maybe the last

one, and you'll get tied up if you're not gone. Take care of yourself, Danny. 'Night, Doris."

It *was* the combo's last number, it turned out, so it was lucky they'd made their getaway. The Casanova is an early club in an early town. Most people come for dinner and don't stay too long afterwards, so the entertainment is off and on between six and midnight. The club stays open another two hours, until the legal closing time, for those who want to stick around that long, but they have to entertain themselves.

The combo now adjourned to the table I had all to myself and after I'd explained and excused Danny and Doris for leaving early, we entertained ourselves, talking, until they closed.

Meanwhile, I sold another car, although not on a very profitable basis. Tommy brought up that they were thinking about renting a car for the month they'd be here, since they'd flown in and didn't have any local transportation. He said one car would do for the three of them, even if they fought over it once in a while. I told them what renting a car for a month would cost them—plenty—and pointed out they'd do better to buy a cheap but usable car and resell it when they took off. I told them we had a '49 Ford on the lot priced at four-fifty and said if they chipped in and bought it for that we'd buy it back at the end of the month for four hundred if they hadn't banged it up any, or for whatever price was fair if they'd damaged it any. They said that sounded swell to them and that they'd be down tomorrow afternoon to look it over and would probably drive it away. We wouldn't make anything on a deal like that, but I knew Danny would back me up on it.

"Where are you boys staying?" I asked. "I'll run you home."

I was mildly surprised to learn that they were staying at a motel —Tommy had to look at his key to tell me the name of it—when they didn't have a car. But they'd intended to rent one tomorrow, so it made sense. They'd seen this one on the way in from the airport in a taxi and because it had a sizeable swimming pool and both Tommy and Mick, especially Mick, liked to swim, they'd had the taxi drop them off there. They'd taken two rooms, Tommy and Frank sharing one and Mick taking the other.

At the motel they tried to talk me into coming in for a nightcap, but I knew that would lead to another hour or two of yak and refused to get out of the car. It was already half past two and I had to get up early to call Danny at breakfast time. But I gave Tommy the telephone number of the office on the lot and told him to call early in the after-

noon. If Danny and I were both there I'd probably be able to drop out and pick them up for a look at the car I had in mind for them.

It was three when I got home and I set the alarm for eight and went right to bed.

When the alarm went off I staggered to the telephone, trying to wake myself up as little as possible, and dialed Danny's number. If he was okay, there was no reason why I shouldn't grab a couple more hours of sleep.

But he wasn't okay. It was Doris who answered the phone and she said, "He's pretty stiff and sore, Ralph. He says to tell you he *can* get down there, but he'll appreciate it if you'll swap shifts today and let him have a few more hours."

"Sure," I told her. "Tell him to come in whenever he feels like it, or not at all. It won't hurt me to do the whole thing one day. Sometime I'll take a day off and get revenge."

"Thanks, Ralph. But he thinks he'll be able to come in by afternoon. Maybe sooner."

"He won't need to let me know," I said. "I'll look for him when and if I see him."

So that ended any chance of my going back to sleep. I took a cold shower to wake up and then shaved and dressed. I remembered my promise to Tommy to bring my own sax when I came out next, and decided that I might decide to do so that evening if Danny came to relieve me, so I put my sax case in the car. I stopped for breakfast en route and got to the lot a little, but not much, after nine o'clock.

It was a dull morning. Not a nibble, unless you could count as such a pair of teen-agers wanting to sell a jalopy. In our business you don't buy jalopies. You *have* jalopies, ones that you've had to take in as trades to sell somewhat better cars, and you're very lucky if you get out of the jalopy whatever trade-in you had to allow on it. So I had to turn the boys down.

A little before noon another jalopy drove onto the lot, and Lieutenant Andrews got out of it. He didn't look as tired as he had last night but he didn't look exactly cheerful either.

I said, "Sorry, but we can't buy it. Or do you want to trade it in on a better one?"

"Might do that, but not today. Mr. Bushman around?"

I told him Danny was still at home, but might be in later.

"He isn't home. I just came from there. His Missus said he'd left about eleven o'clock. Well, I wanted to talk to her anyway, and I had a chance to do that. Where do you suppose Mr. Bushman might have gone?"

I shrugged. "Some errands, maybe. We're trading shifts today so he isn't due here till

one o'clock. Anything new on the matter?"

"Not on our end. Thought maybe after a night's sleep, your friend might be able to remember and tell us something he might have missed before." He took off his hat and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. "Nobody else has been beat up yet."

For a second I didn't get it and said "Huh?" but I realized what he meant before he went on to explain, "If that was mistaken identity or wrong address, somebody's going to find out he made a mistake."

I said, "Or maybe the right victim won't report it—if he knows he had it coming."

"Could be. You haven't thought of anything to add, have you? Or learned anything new out at that club after I left?"

I told him no to both questions. But then I added, "You said you wanted to talk to the boys in the combo. I drove them home last night so I can tell you where they're holing in—the Cypress Lodge, a motel out on Centralia."

"Thanks. Don't think I'll look them up today, though, if ever. There's no way they could be involved in this that I can see; they were playing at the club when it happened."

"That's right," I said. "And even if they weren't playing at that moment, there wouldn't be time between sets for anyone at the club to get into town and back again. It's at least three quarters of an hour each way."

"I know." He got back into his car and started the engine but instead of driving off he leaned his elbows on top of the door and looked at me.

He said, "I'll level with you, Son. Unless something new develops, there's nothing more we can do on this case. Especially where the victim can't identify his attacker even if he sees him. If it was mistaken identity and if another beating is reported, then we'll have a lead. If it wasn't—"

He hesitated and I prompted him. "If it wasn't, then what?"

"Then we're still not going to get anywhere unless your friend decides to level with us. If a man gets beat up on purpose, he knows why it happened all right. If, for reasons of his own, he won't tell us that, then we can't help him."

"You've got a point there," I admitted. "Shall I tell Danny you'll be back?"

"No, because I won't. I've got something else to do this afternoon, but it's paper work and I'll be at headquarters. You have a talk with your friend and tell him what I told you, and tell him to drop by and see me, or else telephone, if he wants to add anything."

"Right, Lieutenant," I said.

Danny showed up a few minutes before one, but I didn't get a chance to talk to him right away because I was talking to a prospect at the time. By the time I was free Danny was busy.

Then there was a lull and I was able to tell him about the lieutenant's call and what he had said.

"Guess he's right," Danny said. "I mean, about there being nothing more they can do about it. And about the fact that if the guy corrects his mistake and beats up the right guy, or already has, it may never get reported to us."

"Uh-huh. How do you feel? Sure you're up to working the rest of the day?"

"Sure. Wouldn't want to climb into the ring with anyone, but nothing hurts any worse when I'm on my feet than when I'm sitting down, so what's to lose working? Any business this morning?"

I told him there hadn't been, but that reminded me to tell him about the deal I'd made—subject to their trying out the car, of course—with the boys in the combo.

Danny approved. "Not much profit if we have to buy it back for only fifty less," he said, "but maybe they won't turn it back. If their next booking turns out to be within driving distance they'll probably decide to keep it. You better run and get yourself some lunch so you'll be free when they call up."

I went to the restaurant across the street and had myself some lunch and when I came back Danny said that Tommy Drum had already called. They were ready.

I hesitated whether to take the Ford—and make one of them drive me back in it if they bought it—or to pick them up in my own car and bring them to the lot. It made sense either way, but I decided on my own car and used it. If we got them on the lot, maybe—if they were solvent enough—they'd fall for one of the better cars instead of the one I'd told them about. By showing them the Ford first I might goof us out of a bigger sale. And a sale it would be, if, as Danny had suggested might happen, they should decide to keep the car and drive to their next booking.

The boys had told me their room numbers but I didn't know where the rooms were located so I parked in front of the motel and walked back. I came to the number that would be Mick's single first and knocked on the door but there wasn't any answer. So I went down the line a few more doors and knocked again. Tommy's voice called out for me to come in.

Tommy Drum was sitting in a chair reading *Downbeat* and Frank Ritchie was sprawled

across the bed busily doing nothing. Tommy said, "Hi, Ralph. Did you bring the Ford?"

"No. Thought I'd take you in to the lot. You might want to look at some others too, before you make up your minds. Where's the Mick?"

"In his room, I guess."

"Isn't," I told him. "I passed his door first and knocked."

Tommy shrugged. "Probably went for a walk like the fresh air fiend he is. Doesn't matter. The three of us talked it over last night after you dropped us off and figured it's a better idea for just Frank and I to buy the car. Mick won't be here the full month if I can get a replacement for him, so he'll just chip in on the running expenses and we'll let it go at that."

"Sounds sensible," I said. "Well, shall we take off?"

"Drink first," Tommy said. "I refuse to look at cars on an empty stomach. Want yours straight, Ralph? Or plain?"

He went to the dresser and poured a shot into each of three glasses, handed them around. I said I didn't want mine either straight or plain and took my glass into the bathroom; I poured about half of it out because he'd made it too big a slug for me to want that early in the day when I'd have to go back to selling cars, and I diluted the rest of it with a couple inches of water.

We sat around with our drinks and Frank said, "Let's kill a little time with these. Maybe Mick just went around the block or something. And even if he isn't shopping on the car, he'd probably want to go into town with us."

"I didn't knock loudly," I said. "Maybe he's still asleep."

Tommy shook his head. "He's up long since. We got up around ten and he was swimming in the pool then. Told us which way to walk to find a restaurant for breakfast within a block. He was out of the pool when we came back but he wouldn't have gone back to sleep. Mick doesn't take naps."

We batted the breeze about nothing until we'd killed our drinks and then tried Mick O'Neill's door again with the same result I'd got twenty minutes before, and we piled into the Merc and went down to the lot.

They looked at several other cars but finally settled for the '49 Ford; I'd guessed right the first time on how high they'd want to go under the circumstances. They made out checks and I made out the papers and they had a car. They offered to drive one or both of us to the nearest bar for a drink to celebrate the deal, and I told Danny to go, since I'd already had a drink with them back at the motel.

Alone on the lot, I found myself drowning in prospects looking at cars, but as soon as the boys brought Danny back the rush dropped off and there was not much doing.

At five, Danny said, "Why don't you run along, Ralph? I can take it from here."

"Sure you're up to working all evening?"

"Sure I'm sure. I'll probably be ready to sleep by the time I'm through though, so I'll give the Casanova a miss tonight. You going?"

I said, "Think I'll have dinner there. At six, when they start serving. Then maybe sit in with the boys for a few numbers. I've got my sax in the car."

"Have a ball. See you tomorrow."

"Maybe sooner. If I don't spend more than an hour or two at the club, I'll drop by the lot on my way home and see how things are going."

But on the way out to the Casanova I decided I didn't want to eat there after all; I just wasn't hungry enough to do justice to a five-buck dinner. So I stopped at a less expensive restaurant en route and saved myself three and a half bucks by having a lighter meal. It was a quarter after six when I got to the club.

Tommy Drum and Frank Ritchie were playing when I walked in with my sax case; Mick O'Neill wasn't on the stand, or in sight. I started over to them and someone touched my arm and said, "Hi, Oliver. Sit down and have a drink with us." It was Max Stivers, the bookie-racketeer who had bought me a drink last night. The beer barrel shaped Gino Itule was with him again.

I said, "I'd better see the boys first. Hasn't Mick O'Neill shown up yet?"

I had to explain to Stivers that Mick O'Neill was the sax with the combo and he said no, there hadn't been a sax on the stand yet tonight.

Tommy saw me coming and brought the number to an end just as I got there.

"Where's Mick?" I asked him.

"Don't know. He hasn't shown up. Thank God you got here. I just phoned the lot and Danny said you were on your way and had your sax with you."

I started getting the sax out of the case and putting it together. I asked, "Didn't you stop by at the motel to get him?"

"Sure, and waited around as long as we could without being late ourselves. Then I shoved a note under his door telling him to take a taxi, and we scrammed. Thought maybe we'd find him already out here, but he wasn't."

"You sure he couldn't have been asleep in his room, Tommy?"

"We knocked loud enough to

wake the dead, and Mick's a light sleeper. Must have gone somewhere and lost track of the time. He ought to show up any minute."

"It's not like Mick to be late," I said. "Maybe something happened to him."

"I'm a little worried too, Ralph. But let's run off two numbers and call this a set, and if he isn't here by then—well, we can phone the motel and ask the guy who runs it to use his pass key and look in Mick's room. And—anything else we can do?"

"Phone the police maybe and see if there's an accident report or something. But okay, we'll give him till half past before we try either of those. Want to give *Stardust* a spin?"

We gave *Stardust* a spin, and then *Don't Stop*. But we did stop, despite applause that wanted us to keep on.

"Come on," Tommy said, "we'll use the phone in the manager's office."

The door of the manager's office was ajar but the room was empty. We were hesitating in the doorway when Max Stivers' voice spoke behind us. "Something wrong, boys?"

"We were looking for the manager," I told him.

"Green? He's around somewhere. Shall I have one of the waiters look for him? Or anything else I can do?"

I explained briefly and Stivers said, "Sure, take over his office, use the phone all you want. When you've found out the score, join me at my table, all three of you."

Tommy called the motel first and explained to and then argued with the proprietor. He swore and put down the phone. "Guy won't check the room. Says if Mick's there and won't answer the door it's his business. Says if we call the cops he'll give them the pass key, but he won't use it himself. Guess we'll have to do it that way."

"Let me," I suggested. I was remembering that Lieutenant Andrews had said he had a lot of paper work at headquarters; he might be working late.

He was. I told him what the situation was, listened to what he had to say. I thanked him and hung up.

"He'll take care of both ends of it," I told Tommy and Frank. "He's right at headquarters so he'll check on accident reports. And he'll have the radio operator instruct the nearest radio car to look in the room. He'll call back as soon as he gets anything."

Tommy sighed. "I can use a drink. I'm getting scared now, Ralph. If it was some guys I'd just figure it didn't mean anything, but not Mick. He'd at least have phoned us."

I took the boys to Stivers'

table. There was a third man there whom I didn't know, but Tommy and Frank knew him and introduced him as Harvey Green, the manager. I told about the call we'd made, and Stivers took over again. He clapped Green on the shoulder and said, "You wait in your office for that call, Harv, so the boys can relax and have a drink." And a snap of his fingers brought a waiter running and got us our round of drinks in a lot less time than we could have got them ourselves.

Stivers tried to keep it from being a wake but none of us felt much like talking and he didn't succeed. Mostly we just sat and nursed our drinks until Green came back and said I was wanted on the phone.

I got there fast. Andrews' voice said, "Bad news, Oliver. Your friend Mick is dead."

My mouth felt suddenly dry. "Dead, how?" I asked.

"Murdered. Beaten up like your partner was, but the beating didn't stop there this time. Hit over the head several times after he was down and out. Probably with a blackjack."

"In his room at the motel?"

"Yeah. I think you boys better come down here, all three of you. The Casanova will have to get by without music, one evening. If anybody out there objects tell 'em it's a police order."

"All right. You mean headquarters or the motel?"

"Make it headquarters. I'm going around to the motel now, but I'll be back here by the time you can make it in from there. Or not much after."

He hung up on me before I could ask any more questions. Back at the table I gave it to them straight, without sitting down again. Tommy Drum looked stunned. He opened his mouth, probably to call me a liar or to ask if I was kidding him, then realized I wouldn't possibly be either lying or kidding about something like that, and closed his mouth again.

Frank Ritchie just stood up and said, "All right, what are we waiting for?"

We took my car, going in, because it was faster. I don't know why we felt there was any hurry, but we did. We didn't talk much, except about one thing. Tommy and Frank had known about Danny's being beaten up last night; it had been mentioned at the table, but played down as something that must have been a mistake. Now they wanted details and I told them the little I knew that they didn't.

I drove to the police station and we all trouped in. A sergeant at the desk had been alerted to our coming; he showed us into a kind of waiting room and told us Lieutenant Andrews would be back soon. The chairs

were hard and uncomfortable, but we sat on them. And waited.

Frank said, "I don't get it. It must have been the same guy who beat up Danny, but who could possibly have a down on both Danny and Mick?"

Neither of us answered him. And that was all the conversation there was until, after half an hour or so, Danny came in. He looked white and shaken, more worried than I'd ever seen him before.

He told us that Andrews had stopped by the lot on his way to the motel and had asked him a few questions and then had asked him to come to the station when he closed the lot at nine. He'd stuck around for a while and then decided to close early and head for headquarters to get it over with.

"Did you phone Doris?" I asked him. And he nodded.

Another half an hour and Andrews came in. He put the finger on Tommy first and took him through a door to a smaller office marked *Private*. After a while—I didn't time it—Tommy came back and said the lieutenant wanted Frank next, so Frank went in.

"Are you free to go, or does he want you to stick around?" I asked Tommy.

"Free to go, but where? Nowhere I want to go alone. Maybe when he's through with Frank, he and I can go somewhere where we can have a drink and wait for you guys."

Danny looked at his watch. "May be pretty late when we get through. Here's a thought. Doris is home alone and probably worried stiff. Why don't you go round to my place and keep her company? We can all head there one at a time as the police get through with us here. And there's liquor."

Tommy said it sounded like a good idea but that he'd wait till Frank was through and the two of them could go around together. But he suggested that meanwhile Danny phone Doris and make sure she liked the idea. Danny nodded and went out into the hallway to use a pay phone. He came back and nodded. "She says it's a swell idea."

We gave Tommy the address of the Bushmans' apartment and I tried to give them the key to my Mercury, since their car was still out at the Casanova, but he insisted they'd rather take a cab than try to follow directions in a strange town by night, so I didn't insist.

And then Frank Ritchie rejoined us and said Andrews wanted to talk to me next. A minute later the lieutenant was looking at me across his desk. The chair I sat on was even harder and more uncomfortable than the ones in the outer office.

He said wearily, "Let's start

with your running through the day for me. Where you were and when."

I started with my alarm going off at eight o'clock and went through it for him.

He nodded when I'd finished. He said, "At least you fellows tell stories that fit together, as far as times are concerned. Not that any of you has an alibi this time."

"What time was Mick O'Neill killed, Lieutenant?" I asked him.

"Give or take an hour, around one o'clock. That makes it between twelve and two. It would have been right around two when you knocked on his door. And he could have answered, and asked you in."

"He could have," I said, "but he didn't. But how about Tommy and Frank? Don't they alibi each other? Unless you think they *both* killed Mick."

The lieutenant sighed. "I don't think anything. But no, they don't alibi each other. About half past one, Mr. Drum left Mr. Ritchie in their room at the motel and went out to make that phone call to the lot that brought you out there to pick them up. He didn't make it from the motel office because he was out of cigarettes anyway so he walked to a store two blocks off and phoned from there. So he could have dropped in on Mr. O'Neill either going or coming. Or Mr. Ritchie could have done it while Mr. Drum was gone."

He got out a crumpled pack of cigarettes, put one in his mouth and lighted it. He said, "And your partner—he hasn't got an alibi either. He left home at eleven and didn't get to the lot until one. Did you ask him what he was doing then?"

"No," I said. "It isn't any of my business."

"I thought you might have got curious anyway. Well, he says he was just driving around thinking. Does that make sense to you?"

"Why not? He sure had something to think about, after what happened to him last night."

"Yeah. Well, he says when he left home at eleven he intended to drive right to the lot and then he got to thinking that there wasn't any point in showing before one, anyway. Says around half past twelve, just before he did come to the lot, he stopped in at a diner and had a sandwich. We can check that, but it doesn't give him an alibi even if it checks because if Mr. O'Neill was killed at twelve, whoever killed him could still have made that diner by half past, or even sooner."

I said, "If you think— Listen, it doesn't make sense. Danny is inches shorter than Mick, and fifty or sixty pounds lighter, and Mick was an athlete to boot. You say Mick was knocked uncon-

scious *before* he was killed with a blackjack or whatever?"

"That's right. And I'll admit I can't see your friend Mr. Bushman doing that, especially picking a fight when he himself had sore ribs and a sore jaw to start with."

"And especially when it could not have been because he thought Mick had beaten him up first, last night. Mick was over twenty miles away when that happened, and playing sax in front of a hundred people."

"Yeah. So more likely the same guy attacked both of them. Who might that have been?"

"I don't know," I said. "I couldn't even guess."

"Nor any reason at all why anyone might have had it in for either one of them, let alone both of them?"

"No," I said. "I wish I could help you, Lieutenant, but it makes nuts." I thought a minute and added, "Maybe quite literally. Last night Danny thought, and I thought with him, that his beating was probably a case of mistaken identity. It's hard to figure it that way now. But our second thought last night—that whoever did it was off his rocker—looks better now than it did then. Nobody could possibly have a sane motive for attacking both Danny and Mick."

"Even a crazy killer would have a motive. One that made sense to him. Could someone have had a grudge against both of them, from way back?"

I said, "It would have to be from way back. There's been no contact direct or indirect between Danny and Mick for longer than the year he and I have been in business here. Probably a year before that would have been the last time they saw one another. That would have been when we were playing with Nick Frazer's band."

"For how long?"

"Danny and I were with Mick for about three months. Mick got taken on two weeks before we left. No connection between his joining and our leaving; we got a better offer, that's all."

"And before that?"

"I'd have to think back to remember times and places but I'd say about three or four times before that Danny and Mick played in the same band, maybe up to two or three months at a time. Always a big band."

"Why always a big band?"

"Any competent musician can read notes and play the arrangements a big band uses. Smaller groups—even small bands, let alone combos—improvise, and when it comes to improvisation, there are different types of musicians. Mick was a Dixieland man, the righteous stuff. Neither Danny nor I swing that way. Did Tommy explain how he happened to have Mick with the combo?"

"Yeah. How did you get along with Mick?"

"Okay. We weren't close friends, but we got along."

"And Danny?"

"They didn't get along very well. But they weren't enemies and neither had anything specific against the other. Just—well, call it a personality clash. Danny can answer that better than I can, and give you reasons, but don't take it seriously because it was nothing serious, believe me."

"I believe you. Mr. Drum tells me he offered you Mick's job last night and you turned it down."

"That's right. Not because Mick would have minded; he wanted me to take it. But when Danny and I bought the lot we decided between us, no more playing. Not professionally, I mean; we sit in on jam sessions once in a while. Or just play together, with Doris on piano."

"She was a singer, wasn't she?"

"Yes. But she plays enough piano to give us a background."

"Going to play saxophone with the combo now?"

I said, "I haven't thought about it."

"Think about it a minute. Won't this make it different?"

"Maybe it will. I doubt if Tommy could get another sax man in town here, even as good as Mick was. He'd probably have to cancel his booking and he's too good a friend for us to want that to happen to. And under those circumstances I'm sure it'll be okay with Danny. In fact, it would have been all right with him if I'd said yes last night, when there wasn't any emergency involved."

"Uh-huh. Well, just one more question, Mr. Oliver. Can you tell me anything at all that even might possibly be helpful, something I might not have asked the right questions to bring out?"

"Not a thing," I said.

"Okay, that's all for now. You're not planning to leave town, I take it. I'll be able to find you on the lot or out at the Casanova."

"Right," I said. "Shall I send Danny in?"

In the outer office I asked Danny if he thought I should wait for him, but he said it would be silly because we each had a car parked outside and couldn't go together anyway.

I found Doris plenty worried and Tommy and Frank both trying to reassure her by telling her Danny couldn't possibly be in any further danger.

"But why," she wanted to know, "was Mick killed? If we don't know that, how can we know there won't be any second attack on Danny?"

Because, I pointed out again and patiently, the man who'd attacked Danny had had him completely at his mercy; if he'd

wanted to kill Danny or even injured him any worse than he had, he could have done so then, in perfect safety.

"That's right, Doris," Tommy said. "You know how I dope it? I don't think that cat intended to kill Mick at all, just to beat him up like he beat Danny. Only Danny went down and out from that first sneak punch—and I'm guessing Mick didn't. Mick was big and tough himself and I'm guessing he put up more of a fight. And got the handkerchief down off the guy's face so he knew who was attacking him, see? So when he did kayo Mick, he went ahead and finished the job so Mick couldn't put the finger on him. Makes sense?"

"Makes sense," I said. "Believe me, if I'm next on his list, I'm going to go down for the count without making a grab for any handkerchief. I'd rather be a live coward than a dead hero."

"Me too," Tommy said. "And because we don't know *why* he put the slug on Danny and Mick, we can't be sure we're not on his list too. Say, Ralph, Frank and I were talking this over on the way here and— Wait, one thing first. You're going to play with us now, aren't you? You're not going to let us down and make us lose that booking, are you?"

Frank said, "It would put us in an awful jam, Ralphie boy. On account that cop ordered us not to leave town, and we'd be strictly on the nut having to stay and not working."

I said, "I want to talk it over with Danny. If he thinks I should—"

"Swell," Tommy said. "Then it's in the bag because I know what Danny'll say. How's about a drink to that? We're ready for another and Ralph hasn't even had one yet. What kind of a hostess are you, Doris?"

Doris laughed and went out into the kitchen to make a round of drinks and Tommy said, "Attaboy, Ralph. Knew you wouldn't let us down. Now here's what we were talking about on the way over here. What kind of a pad you got?"

"Bachelor apartment. Two rooms and a kitchenette I never use."

"Sleep three?"

"If somebody sleeps on the couch, yes."

"Then why don't we check out of the motel and triple up? Big as that guy is, he isn't going to tangle with three of us at once and if we stick together as much as possible it'll be that much tougher for him to dope a way to get at any one of us alone."

Doris came in with a tray of drinks just as I was saying that it sounded like a good idea to me.

We told her what we'd decided and she said it sounded sensible to her.

"And we'll all save money," Frank said. "We chip in on Ralph's rent, natch, but it probably won't come to as much as the motel. What do you pay, Ralph?"

We were still trying to figure out what a third of eighty dollars was when Danny came in. We briefed him while Doris went out to make him a drink. He approved down the line and said that if I *didn't* help the boys out by playing with them, he'd disown me.

And we worked out a schedule for handling the lot. Danny would work the regular shift I'd been working, one o'clock in the afternoon till nine at night. I'd take the shift he'd had, but shorten it at both ends by not opening the lot until ten in the morning—we never did much business the first hour anyway—and working until three or four o'clock, depending on whether we were busy or not. That would give me two or three hours to clean up, rest a little, and go out to the club with Tommy and Frank in time for the combo to start swinging at six. Because I'd be putting in fewer hours than he on the lot, I talked Danny into agreeing to take two thirds of our profits for the next month, instead of half. I pointed out that with what Tommy would be paying me I'd still be coming out way ahead on the deal. Doris backed me up on that, and Danny gave in and said okay.

Tommy decided he'd better call the club and tell them the combo had a new sax lined up, and that they could count on us tomorrow evening. While he was making the call, I asked Danny if the lieutenant, in talking to him, had come up with anything new.

Danny shook his head. "He isn't through with me, though; just called it off because it was getting so late. He's going to come here tomorrow morning to talk some more. Wants to talk to Doris too, or he'd probably have asked me to come back there."

We broke it up just short of midnight. I drove the boys to the motel and waited till they'd packed their stuff, then took them home with me. We made our sleeping arrangements, had a nightcap, and turned in.

That was the end of the second day.

Nothing startling happened for the next week. The investigation brought out some things about Mick that we hadn't known, including the fact that he'd really been stashing his dough during the dozen-odd years he'd been playing. He was more solvent than all the rest of us put together, with bank accounts and stocks and bonds adding up to nearly twenty thousand dollars. We'd talked about chip-

ping in for a funeral for him, but when we learned that, we quit talking about it. Or, for that matter, about having the funeral here. It turned out that both his parents were still living, in Cincinnati. His body was flown there for the funeral, as soon as the police released it. Since Mick had been working with them at the time he died; Tommy and Frank thought they ought to go to the funeral, but since the Casanova manager didn't look kindly on the idea of a second comboless evening, they compromised on letting Frank Ritchie represent both of them; I was able to find them a local skin man who was free and who was good enough to hold down Frank's end of the combo for the one evening he'd have to be gone if he flew both ways. Tommy Drum's piano held the combo together and was irreplaceable so he had to stay. We all sent flowers, of course. Frank came back looking a bit stunned and said he was surprised that a Dixie man could have so many friends. He said cats had come to the funeral from as far away as New Orleans and San Francisco.

Toward the end of the week Danny came out twice and brought Doris, after closing the lot. The second time he brought his trumpet and sat in with us for a few numbers. And we talked Doris into singing a couple of numbers, and the customers really got their money's worth that night.

That was a Wednesday night, and the next night was a Thursday and the night after that a Friday; it was around half past seven and we'd finished our second set and were sitting at one of the tables. With Max Stivers and his friend Gino; Stivers had invited us over again. Had offered to buy us drinks too, but we'd turned them down except that Tommy Drum had taken a coke. When you're playing till midnight you can't start drinking too early and unless there was special occasion for it, we laid off taking our first drink of the evening until ten or eleven o'clock, when a lift would be welcome to carry us the rest of the way. But we'd sat down with them and were batting the breeze with them. With Stivers, anyway, Gino never said much.

Then there was a hand lightly on my shoulder and I looked up and saw Lieutenant Andrews was standing beside me. He said, "Mind if I sit down?"

The chair next to mine was empty and I said, "Sure, Lieutenant." And then corrected myself. "That is, this is Mr. Stivers' table, so I really shouldn't invite you." I started to introduce them, but Stivers smiled. "We know one another, Ralph. Sit down, Andrews. Drink?"

The lieutenant shook his head.

"Didn't know you knew these boys, Mr. Stivers."

"Sure I know them. I hang out here. And like music."

"Do any business with them?"

Max Stivers quit smiling. "Is that any business of yours, Andrews? You're not in your territory here. This is outside city limits, way outside."

"Yeah," the lieutenant said. "Forget I asked."

Stivers smiled again. "But since you did ask, the answer is no. None of these boys are horse players."

"Is their friend, Mr. Danny Bushman, a horse player?"

The smile stayed on Stivers' lips but went out of his eyes. He said shortly, "I've met him. I don't know him well enough to know that. Andrews, is this an interrogation?"

The lieutenant sighed and took a pipe and tobacco pouch from his pocket. "No, it isn't. But I was just wondering. And I'm wondering, too, if Mr. O'Neill was a horse player."

Tommy Drum cut in. "I can answer that, Lieutenant. Mick was down on gambling, all kinds. He wouldn't even match pennies with you."

The lieutenant got his pipe going and didn't ask any more questions, and gradually things got less tense than they'd seemed to be for a few minutes. The conversation got on Dave Brubeck and from Brubeck it got, somehow, to Bix Beiderbecke. Musicians' talk.

I'd just glanced at my watch —Tommy never wears one and he'd put me in charge of keeping time on our breaks—and decided we had a few minutes left before we had to start playing again, when there was another hand on my shoulder and I looked up again. It was a man I knew only very slightly and only by his last name, Hart. He owned a sporting goods store a couple of blocks from the lot and I'd bought a set of golf clubs from him, and once he'd been on the lot and looked at cars, but hadn't bought one.

I said, "Hi," and he said "Hi, Oliver. Don't bother introducing me around; I've got to get back to my table. Just want to ask you one question."

"Shoot," I said.

"Drove past your lot on my way here but didn't have time to stop or I'd have made myself late. But what's the price on that Cad you've got there?"

"Cad?" I said blankly. "There isn't any Cad on the lot. You must've mistaken some other car for one."

"No, this was a Cad all right. I pulled in to the curb and had a close look at it. But I saw your partner was busy with another customer and I'd have made myself late here if I'd waited to ask him. It's a yellow hardtop, late model, couldn't be over a year

old. Looked practically brand new."

I shook my head. "It wasn't there this afternoon, when I left at three o'clock. Danny must have taken it in."

He shrugged and said, "Okay, I'll drop by tomorrow sometime. It's sure a sweet car."

He started to turn away but Lieutenant Andrews' voice said, "Just a minute, Sir." And I realized that everyone at the table had been listening to the conversation.

Hart turned back and said "Yes?" politely to the lieutenant. Since they were going to talk anyway, I said, "Lieutenant Andrews, Mr. Hart."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Hart. Just want to ask this. Could that Cadillac have been a customer's car?"

"Not the way it was parked, lined up with the others. A customer wouldn't drive in and park his car that way. It was between an Olds Rocket 88 convertible and a Buick Special. All three of them look like almost new cars." He turned back to me. "When I drop by tomorrow I want a look at that Rocket too."

"Thanks, Mr. Hart," the lieutenant said.

And then he was looking at me hard, across the table. "Mr. Oliver, was there a late model Buick Special on the lot this afternoon?"

I said, "A Buick Roadmaster. He just got the model wrong."

"Was there an Olds convertible?"

I shook my head.

"All right, let's say he made a mistake on the Buick. Would your partner be likely to have bought *two* almost new, expensive cars in one afternoon without consulting you?"

I said, "It would be unusual, but he's got the authority to. If he got them at a good enough price—"

"Is there enough cash in your checking account for him to have bought them?"

I said, "They could have been trades. Trade-downs. Sometimes a man has an expensive car but goes broke and needs dough. He'll trade it for an older model and a cash difference. Or they could have been left on consignment."

"How does that work?"

"Well, we don't do this often but sometimes we don't want to buy a car outright for what a customer wants for it but if he wants us to we leave it on the lot and try to sell it for him if we can get enough to give him his price and leave a profit for us. We used to do that oftener when we were first starting and didn't have enough cars to make a good showing on the lot."

The lieutenant said, "Uh-huh," and stood up slowly. "Well, I thought I was through for the day but I think I'll want

to talk to Mr. Bushman. And if any of you have in mind to telephone him and warn him I'm coming, it won't do any good. If I find those two or three cars gone off the lot, he's going to have to do a lot more explaining than if they're still there."

He looked around the table to take in all of us, and stiffened suddenly. He snapped at Max Stivers, "Where's your goon?"

"You mean Gino?" Stivers asked blandly. "I don't know. I guess I didn't notice him leave."

"You sent him to—" He broke off and swung around to grab me by the shoulder. "Take me to a telephone."

I hurried with him to the manager's office. The door was closed. He jerked it open without knocking and bolted in; the office was vacant. He hurried to the desk and then swore and held up a broken phone cord. "What other phones—? Never mind, if he yanked this cord, he took care of the others. Son, have you got a fast car and can you handle it?"

"Yes," I said. We were already running out. I saw Tommy and Frank starting after us, but we didn't wait for them.

I led him to the Merc and Tommy and Frank caught up with us and started to pile in the back seat. Andrews stopped them. "You fellows got another car?"

"Yeah," Tommy said, "but not as fast—"

"Never mind that. Take your car and find the nearest public phone you can use. Don't waste time calling your friend—call the police. Tell them to get cops on that lot *fast*. Tell 'em they may have to stop a murder."

They were running for the car I'd sold them while I got the Merc percolating and gunned it. I asked, "Do you really think—?"

"Don't talk, Son. Concentrate on driving and I'll do the talking. Your night vision's good?"

"Yes."

"Mine's a little under standard. I'll drive as fast as I have to by day, but at night I don't dare go over forty or so, even on a clear road. You go as fast as you think is safe. Don't worry about tickets. If a cop car gets on our tail, that's fine. I'll ask him to go ahead of us and use his siren. And his radio, if he's got one."

Out of the corner of my eye I could see that he'd taken a gun out of a shoulder holster. It was a flat automatic. He worked the slide to jack a bullet from the clip into the firing chamber and then put the gun back in the holster.

"Watch it, Son," he said, as I passed a car with a rather risky margin of safety against a truck coming the other way. "I've got guts, but I don't want them

strewn along the highway. And we aren't going to help your partner any getting ourselves killed. Did you notice Gino leave, how long it was before we missed him?"

"Right after Hart came up and started asking me about the Cad, I think."

"Then he's got a pretty fair start on us. You argued with Mr. Hart a while, and then you and I did some yakking. Even allowing him a couple of minutes to pull out telephone cords, he's got at least five minutes start and maybe ten. 'Course we don't know what kind of a car he's got or how well he can handle it. You're doing fine on this one, but don't try it any faster."

I had to slow down a little as we flashed through a block with lighted stores. The lieutenant said, "That's where your friends will be able to phone from. I'd say it's about a dead toss-up whether or not we get there before they get their call through and get results from it."

I said, "You called Gino a goon. Do you think he killed Mick and beat up Danny? But Danny described his attacker as six feet tall and Gino's built like—"

"Don't talk, Son. Yeah, Gino's built short and broad, but he's got power. Used to fight pro, and used to wrestle. Yeah, he's a goon, for Stivers. People who are beaten up by goons sometimes give wrong descriptions, on purpose. We'll worry about that later. It's funny, I knew Stivers was in on a lot of things, but I never thought he had a part in a hot car racket. And I never thought of your used car lot being used to unload them. It's a natural. Now don't run off the road when I ask you this, but are you sure you weren't onto what was going on?"

I said, "I'm still not onto what's going on. Especially how *Mick* figures in on it."

"I'm beginning to get a hunch on that. Well, Son, we're getting close." He took the pistol out of its holster again and this time kept it in his hand. "You don't by any chance have a gun on you or in the car, do you?"

I told him I hadn't. "Then I want you to stay out of whatever happens," he said. "You just pull up and park in front of—"

We were a block and a half away then, and we heard the shots. Two of them. And we were half a block away when a dark green coupé pulled out of the lot and turned away from us.

It didn't have speed as yet and at the speed we were going I could easily have caught it and boxed it to the curb, but a light turned red in my face and another car pulled out in front of

me from the intervening intersection and I had to slam on brakes and barely avoided a smash-up. The screeching stop killed my engine and before I could start it again there was another screeching—of sirens. A car with two men in it slowed down alongside ours, and the lieutenant yelled to them to get the green coupé—and to be careful because there was an armed killer in it. The car took off, siren going and red light flashing, and another like it came from behind us and joined the chase.

"They'll get Gino," the lieutenant said. "He hasn't a chance. We stay here."

I had the engine going again now, and I drove onto the lot.

* * *

It was two o'clock in the morning when a doctor came into the hospital waiting room and told us Danny was dead. He said, "Lieutenant Andrews asked me to tell you that he'll appreciate if you'll all wait here a few minutes. He's on the telephone now, but he wants to talk to you."

Doris was crying softly. She had hold of my hand and was squeezing my fingers spasmodically, so hard that it almost hurt.

Danny had recovered consciousness for a while, and Doris and I had each had a few minutes with him. I don't know what he told her, but he'd asked me to take care of Doris if he died—and I think he knew that he was going to. And he'd made a full statement to the police and had lived to sign it. Anyway, he'd lived longer than Gino. The green coupé, doing better than eighty, had gone off the road and into a tree when a police bullet had found a back tire. And Pat Stivers was under arrest. The lieutenant had come into the waiting room and told us both of those things before Danny had recovered consciousness.

And now the lieutenant came in again. As he looked from one of us to another—Tommy and Frank were there too, of course—he looked more tired than I'd ever seen him look before.

He spoke to Doris. "Do you want the details tonight, Mrs. Bushman? Or would you rather wait?"

Doris got her sobbing under control and told him she'd rather hear it now.

He said, "Your husband got to playing the horses again; he's been playing heavily for six months now. And he got deeper into debt trying to get out, and Stivers let him do it, gave him credit. As of last week he owed Stivers three and a half thousand dollars. And Stivers decided it was time to close the trap.

"He sent his goon, Gino Itule, to see Mr. Bushman. What

happened there wasn't just what your husband told us. Gino wasn't masked and he didn't swing the second he came through the door. He told your husband to see Stivers the next day, and either to bring cash for what he owed or be ready to listen to a proposition about using the used car lot as an outlet for stolen cars until the commissions Stivers would pay him for selling them would cover that debt. Your husband said no to that, and that's when Gino knocked him out and gave him a few kicks to help him think it over.

"When your husband left at eleven the next day he went to see Stivers—and he'd been convinced. But he said you, Mr. Oliver, wouldn't go for it and he couldn't risk having the hot cars on the lot even when you were off shift because you often dropped in even when you were not working, to see how things were going. Stivers had an answer for that. Gino was still around, and with a broken leg you wouldn't be dropping in for a while."

The lieutenant was looking at me now. He said, "Naturally your partner, because he was your friend too, wouldn't agree to that. But he had another answer. He said that if Mr. O'Neill was hurt, maybe a broken arm, badly enough so he wouldn't be able to play saxophone for a month then he was certain you'd not let Mr. Drum down, but would agree to join him.

"So he sent Gino to beat up Mr. O'Neill and what happened there was like we figured. Mr. O'Neill resisted and was strong enough to get the mask down off Gino's face. It hadn't been intended as a murder—till then.

"That scared Mr. Bushman, but it was too late for him to back out. He himself had suggested the beating up and that made him an accessory to murder now. Anyway, he could count on you being away from the lot—and far enough away that you couldn't drop in accidentally—all evening every evening. The stolen cars, three or four at a time, were garaged nearby and every evening after you were on your way to the Casanova, Gino would help drive them onto the lot. And off the lot again at closing time. Your partner had sold three of those cars the first week. Four or five more and his commissions on them would have put him in the clear—or so he thought; I doubt if Stivers would have let him off the hook that easily. But that doesn't matter now.

"The blow-up tonight was when, by sheer accident, someone told you about cars being on the lot that you knew didn't belong there—and told you when I was listening and when Stivers and Gino were there too.

Stivers acted quick; he saw right at the start of that conversation what it was going to lead to and whispered quick orders to Gino. But Gino wasn't quite fast enough to make a clean getaway. If he had, we might have guessed down the line, but we would not have had positive proof."

"I—I think I understand everything now, Lieutenant," Doris said. "Is that all?"

"Not quite. There's something else I think you should understand. Mr. Oliver's part in this. If he hadn't done what he did, Mr. Bushman wouldn't be dead, might not even have got into serious trouble."

I said, "You're crazy, Andrews. What did I do?"

"Nothing, Son. Nothing at all. That's the whole trouble. You *must* have known your partner was gambling again and getting in over his head. Why, when you assured me he wasn't tangled with some other woman you admitted you and he were so much together you'd know something like that even if his wife didn't suspect it. And he wouldn't have been as secretive about horse playing as he would about that, especially from you. And you mean to tell me he could go that far in debt and worry about it without your even suspecting?"

I said, "I knew he was worrying about something, but—"

"And you knew, or guessed, what. When you found him beaten up that night, you knew he was in over his head, and what did you do about it? Try to talk him into leveling with you so you could help him straighten out whatever it was? Or pretend to believe what he told you, so he'd get himself in deeper?"

I said, "I *did* believe it. And why do you think I wanted Danny in trouble. He was my best friend."

"Until he got married, he was. But you were both in love with the same woman, and I think you still want her. And I think that six months or a year from now, except for what I'm saying, you'd be getting her. Son, you figured it that way. Your Danny was weak, you'd probably saved him from getting into serious trouble more than once since you went to school together. And you knew that if you pretended to keep on being his friend sooner or later his weakness would get him in trouble again and that all you'd have to do was what you did this time—nothing. Am I right?"

"You're *not*. This is slander, Lieutenant. I could—"

"You could sue me, Son, but you won't, because I'm right. You could have stopped things from happening as they did easily, when he first started gambling again. Even after he was beaten up, if you'd talked him

into leveling with you. The only trouble he was in up to then was owing money."

Sometime long ago Doris' hand had dropped mine.

The lieutenant said, "And tonight, Son, was the real clincher. You saw Gino leave the table—right after we'd learned that there was a strange Cadillac on your lot. You had more information then than I did; you guessed the truth quicker. So what did you do? You kept me busy and distracted as long as you could, explaining how strange cars could have been taken in as trade-downs or could have been taken onto the lot on consignment. You kept me distracted just long enough to let your partner get killed. And there's no charge I can bring against you."

Doris stood up suddenly. "Thank you, Lieutenant. Thank you very much. Tommy, Frank, will you take me home please?"

They followed, and at the doorway Tommy Drum turned. He said, "There isn't any more combo; I'll cancel the booking. The Casanova manager will send you a check."

The door closed behind them. Definitely.

"Happy, Son?" the lieutenant asked.

"Damn you," I said. "Don't call me Son!"

"You'd rather I use all four words of the phrase, Son?"

INTRODUCING THE SAINT-O-GRAM

This cryptogram is an excerpt from a story appearing in this issue. Can you decipher the letters used and determine what story and character it refers to? If you can discover the method used, code-wise, in assigning the letters, you should be able to read this without *too* much difficulty.

WYJ BQOQWNT SEO EX JLZJTLG SYQWJ-
YEQTJZ IJXWLJPEX SQWY WYJ AXZJTOW-
EXZQXI JGJO EXZ EQT NV WTJPJXZNAO
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QPPJZQEWJLG RNXVJOOJZ YQPOJLV WN KJ.

Turn to page 114 for the answer.

the export trade

by . . . Leslie Charteris

A good crook never underestimates another.

IT IS a notable fact, which might be made the subject of a profound philosophical discourse by anyone with time to spare for these recreations, that the characteristics which go to make a successful buccaneer are almost the same as those required by the detective whose job it is to catch him.

That he must be a man of infinite wit and resource goes without saying; but there are other and more uncommon essentials. He must have an unlimited memory not only for faces and names, but also for every odd and out-of-the-way fact that comes to his knowledge. Out of a molehill of coincidence he must be able to build up a mountain of inductive speculation that would make Sherlock Holmes feel dizzy. He must be a man of infinite human sympathy, with an unstinted gift for forming weird and wonderful friendships. He must, in fact, be equally like the talented historian whose job it is to chronicle his exploits—with the outstanding difference that instead of

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Following the archaeological trend which recently dug up the first novelet about THE SAINT, *I have ventured to disinter this time his very first appearance in the short-story length. But this one is offered without apology—and with an explanatory reminder that it was written when some of the mechanics of air travel were different, and money was worth a lot more than it is today.*

From: THE BRIGHTER BUCCANEER. Copyright, 1933, by Leslie Charteris
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being free to ponder the problems which arise in the course of his vocation for sixty hours, his decisions will probably have to be formed in sixty seconds.

Simon Templar fulfilled at least one of these qualifications to the *n*th degree. He had queer friends dotted about in every outlandish corner of the globe, and if many of them lived in unromantic-sounding parts of London, it was not his fault. Strangely enough, there were not many of them who knew that the debonair young man with the lean tanned face and gay blue eyes who drifted in and out of their lives at irregular intervals was the notorious lawbreaker known to everyone as the Saint. Certainly old Charlie Milton did not know.

The Saint, being in the region of the Tottenham Court Road one afternoon with half an hour to dispose of, dropped into Charlie's attic work-room and listened to a new angle on the changing times.

"There's not much doing in my line these days," said Charlie, wiping his steel-rimmed spectacles. "When nobody's going in for real expensive jewelry, because the costume stuff is so good, it stands to reason they don't need any dummies. Look at this thing—the first big bit of work I've had for weeks."

He produced a glittering rope of diamonds, set in a cunning chain of antique silver and ending in a wonderfully elaborate heart-shaped pendant. The sight of it should have made any honest buccaneer's mouth water, but it so happened that Simon Templar knew better. For that was the secret of Charlie Milton's employment.

Up there, in his dingy little shop, he laboured with marvelously delicate craftsmanship over the imitations which had made his name known to every jeweler in London. Sometimes there were a hundred thousand pounds' worth of precious stones littered over his bench, and he worked under the watchful eye of a detective detailed to guard them. Whenever a piece of jewelry was considered too valuable to be displayed by its owner on ordinary occasions, it was sent to Charlie Milton for him to make one of his amazingly exact facsimiles; and there was many a wealthy dowager who brazenly paraded Charlie's handiwork at minor social functions, while the priceless originals were safely stored in a safe deposit.

"The K e l l m a n necklace," Charlie explained, tossing it carelessly back into a drawer. "Lord Palfrey ordered it from me a month ago, and I was just finishing it when he went bankrupt. I had twenty five pounds advance when I took it on, and I expect that's all I shall see for my trouble. The necklace is be-

ing sold with the rest of his things, and how do I know whether the people who buy it will want my copy?"

It was not an unusual kind of conversation to find its place in the Saint's varied experience, and he never foresaw the path it was to play in his career. Some days later he happened to notice a newspaper paragraph referring to the sale of Lord Palfrey's house and effects; but he thought nothing more of the matter, for men like Lord Palfrey were not Simon Templar's game.

In the days when some fresh episode of Saintly audacity was one of the most dependable weekly stand-bys of the daily press, the victims of his lawlessness had always been men whose reputations would have emerged considerably dishevelled from such a searching inquiry as they were habitually at pains to avoid; and although the circumstances of Simon Templar's life had altered a great deal since then, his elastic principles of morality performed their acrobatic contortions within much the same limits.

That those circumstances should have altered at all was not his choice; but there are boundaries which every buccaneer must eventually reach, and Simon Templar had reached them rather rapidly. The manner of his reaching them has been related elsewhere, and there were not a few people in England who remembered that story. For one week of blazing headlines the secret of the Saint's real identity had been published up and down the country for all to read; and although there were many to whom the memory had grown dim, and who could still describe him only by the nickname which he had made famous, there were many others who had not forgotten. The change had its disadvantages, for one of the organizations which would never forget had its headquarters at Scotland Yard; but there were occasional compensations in the strange commissions which sometimes came the Saint's way.

One of these arrived on a day in June, brought by a somberly-dressed man who called at the flat on Piccadilly where Simon Templar had taken up his temporary abode—the Saint was continually changing his address, and this palatial apartment, with tall windows overlooking the Green Park, was his latest fancy. The visitor was an elderly white-haired gentleman with the understanding eyes and air of tremendous discretion which one associates in imagination with the classical type of family solicitor that he immediately confessed himself to be.

"To put it as briefly as possible, Mr. Templar," he said, "I am authorized to ask if you

would undertake to deliver a sealed package to an address in Paris which will be given you. All your expenses will be paid, of course; and you will be offered a fee of one hundred pounds."

Simon lighted a cigarette and blew a cloud of smoke at the ceiling.

"It sounds easy enough," he remarked. "Wouldn't it be cheaper to send it by mail?"

"That package, Mr. Templar —the contents of which I am not allowed to disclose—is insured for five thousand pounds," said the solicitor impressively. "But I fear that four times that sum would not compensate for the loss of an article which is the only thing of its kind in the world. The ordinary detective agencies have already been considered, but our client feels that they are scarcely competent to deal with such an important task. We have been warned that an attempt may be made to steal the package, and it is our client's wish that we should endeavor to secure the services of your own —ah—singular experience."

The Saint thought it over. He knew that the trade in illicit drugs does not go on to any appreciable extent from England to the Continent, but rather in the reverse direction; and apart from such a possibility as that the commission seemed straightforward enough.

"Your faith in my reformed character is almost touching," said the Saint at length; and the solicitor smiled faintly.

"We are relying on the popular estimate of your sporting instincts."

"When do you want me to go?"

The solicitor placed the tips of his fingers together with a discreet modicum of satisfaction.

"I take it that you are prepared to accept our offer?"

"I don't see why I shouldn't. A pal of mine who came over the other day told me there was a darn good show at the *Folies Bergère,* and since you're only young once—"

"Doubtless you will be permitted to include the entertainment in your bill of expenses," said the solicitor dryly. "If the notice is not too short, we should be very pleased if you were free to visit the—ah—*Folies Bergère* tomorrow night."

"Suits me," murmured the Saint laconically.

The solicitor rose.

"You will travel by air, of course," he said. "I shall return later this evening to deliver the package into your keeping, after which you will be solely responsible. If I might give you a hint, Mr. Templar," he added, as the Saint shepherded him to the door, "you will take particular pains to conceal it while you are traveling. It has been suggested

to us that the French police are not incorruptible."

He repeated his warning when he came back at six o'clock and left Simon with a brown-paper packet about four inches square and two inches deep, in which the outlines of a stout cardboard box could be felt. Simon weighed the package several times in his hand—it was neither particularly light nor particularly heavy, and he puzzled over its possible contents for some time. The address to which it was to be delivered was typed on a plain sheet of paper; Simon committed it to memory, and burnt it.

Curiosity was the Saint's weakness. It was that same insatiable curiosity which had made his fortune, for he was incapable of looking for long at anything that struck him as being the least bit peculiar without succumbing to the temptation to probe deeper into its peculiarities. It never entered his head to betray the confidence that had been placed in him, so far as the safety of the package was concerned; but the mystery of its contents was one which he considered had a definite bearing on whatever risks he had agreed to take. He fought off his curiosity until he got up the next morning, and then it got the better of him. He opened the packet after his early breakfast, carefully removing the seals intact with a hot palette-knife, and was very glad that he had done so.

When he drove down to Croydon aerodrome later the package had been just as carefully refastened, and no one would have known that it had been opened. He carried it inside a book, from which he had cut the printed part of the pages to leave a square cavity encircled by the margins; and he was prepared for trouble.

He checked in his suit-case and waited around patiently during the dilatory system of preparations which for some extraordinary reason is introduced to negative the theoretical speed of air transport. He was fishing out his cigarette-case for the second time when a dark and strikingly pretty girl, who had been waiting with equal patience, came over and asked him for a light.

Simon produced his lighter, and the girl took a pack of cigarettes from her bag and offered him one.

"Do they always take as long as this?" she said.

"Always when I'm traveling," said the Saint resignedly. "Another thing I should like to know is why they have to arrange their time-tables so that you never have the chance to get a decent lunch. Is it for the benefit of the French restaurants -at dinner-time?"

She laughed.

"Are we fellow passengers?"

"I do not know. I'm for Paris."

"I'm for Ostend."

The Saint sighed.

"Couldn't you change your mind and come to Paris?"

He had taken one puff from the cigarette. Now he took a second, while she eyed him impudently. The smoke had an unfamiliar, slightly bitter taste to it. Simon drew on the cigarette again thoughtfully, but this time he held the smoke in his mouth and let it trickle out again presently, as if he had inhaled. The expression on his face never altered, although the last thing he had expected had been trouble of that sort.

"Do you think we could take a walk outside?" said the girl. "I'm simply stifling."

"I think it might be a good idea," said the Saint.

He walked out with her into the clear morning sunshine, and they strolled idly along the gravel drive. The rate of exchange had done a great deal to discourage foreign travel that year, and the airport was unusually deserted. A couple of men were climbing out of a car that had drawn up beside the building; but apart from them there was only one other car turning in at the gates leading from the main road, and a couple of mechanics fussing round a gigantic Handley-Page that was ticking over on the tarmac.

"Why did you give me a doped cigarette?" asked the Saint with perfect casualness; but as the girl turned and stared at him his eyes leapt to hers with the cold suddenness of bared steel.

"I—I don't understand. Do you mind telling me what you mean?"

Simon dropped the cigarette and trod on it deliberately.

"Sister," he said, "if you're thinking of a Simon Templar who was born yesterday, let me tell you it was someone else of the same name. You know, I was playing that cigarette trick before you cut your teeth."

The girl's hand went to her mouth; then it went up in a kind of wave. For a moment the Saint was perplexed; and then he started to turn. She was looking at something over his shoulder, but his head had not revolved far enough to see what it was before the solid weight of a sandbag slugged viciously into the back of his neck. He had one instant of feeling his limbs sagging powerlessly under him, while the book he carried dropped from his hand and sprawled open to the ground; and then everything went dark.

He came back to earth in a small barely-furnished office overlooking the landing-field, and in the face that was bending over him he recognized the

round pink countenance of Chief Inspector Teal, of Scotland Yard.

"Were you the author of that clout?" he demanded, rubbing the base of his skull tenderly. "I didn't think you could be so rough."

"I didn't do it," said the detective shortly. "But we've got the man who did—if you want to charge him. I thought you'd have known Kate Allfield, Saint."

Simon looked at him.

"What—not 'the Mug'? I have heard of her, but this is the first time we've met. And she nearly made me smoke a sleepy cigarette!" He grimaced. "What was the idea?"

"That's what we're waiting for you to tell us," said Teal grimly. "We drove in just as they knocked you out. We know what they were after all right—the Deacon's gang beat them to the necklace, but that wouldn't make the Green Cross bunch give up. What I want to know is when you started working with the Deacon."

"This is right over my head," said the Saint, just as bluntly. "Who is this Deacon, and who the hell are the Green Cross bunch?"

Teal faced him calmly.

"The Green Cross bunch are the ones that slugged you. The Deacon is the head of the gang that got away with the Palfrey jewels yesterday. He came to see you twice yesterday afternoon—we got the wire that he was planning a big job and we were keeping him under observation, but the jewels weren't missed till this morning. Now I'll hear what you've got to say; but before you begin I'd better warn you—"

"Wait a minute." Simon took out his cigarette-case and helped himself to a smoke. "With an unfortunate r e p u t a t i o n like mine, I expect it'll take me some time to drive it into your head that I don't know a thing about the Deacon. He came to me yesterday and said he was a solicitor—he wanted me to look after a valuable sealed packet that he was sending over to Paris, and I took on the job. That's all. He wouldn't even tell me what was in it."

"Oh, yes?" The detective was dangerously polite. "Then I suppose it'd give you the surprise of your life if I told you that that package you were carrying contained a diamond necklace valued at about eight thousand pounds?"

"It would," said the Saint.

Teal turned.

There was a plain-clothes man standing guard by the door, and on the table in the middle of the room was a litter of brown paper and tissue in the midst of which gleamed a small heap of coruscating stones and shining metal. Teal put a hand to the heap of

jewels and lifted it up into a streamer of iridescent fire.

"This is it," he said.

"May I have a look at it?" said the Saint.

He took the necklace from Teal's hand and studied it closely under the light. Then he handed it back with a brief grin.

"If you could get eighty pounds for it, you'd be lucky," he said. "It's a very good imitation, but I'm afraid the stones are only jargoons."

The detective's eyes went wide. Then he snatched the necklace and examined it himself.

He turned around again slowly.

"I'll begin to believe you were telling the truth for once, Templar," he said, and his manner had changed so much that the effect would have been comical without the back-handed apology. "What do you make of it?"

"I think we've both been had," said the Saint. "After what you've told me, I should think the Deacon knew you were watching him, and knew he'd have to get the jewels out of the country in a hurry. He could probably fence most of them quickly, but no one would touch that necklace—it's too well known. He had the rather artistic idea of trying to get me to do the job—"

"Then why should he give you a fake?"

Simon shrugged.

"Maybe that Deacon is smoother than any of us thought. My God, Teal—think of it! Suppose even all this was just a blind—for you to know he'd been to see me—for you to get after me as soon as the jewels were missed—hear I'd left for Paris—chase me to Croydon—and all the time the real necklace is slipping out by another route—"

"God damn!" said Chief Inspector Teal, and launched himself at the telephone with surprising speed for such a portly and lethargic man.

The plain-clothes man at the door stood aside almost respectfully for the Saint to pass.

Simon fitted his hat on rakishly and sauntered out with his old elegance. Out in the waiting-room an attendant was shouting, "All Ostend and Brussels passengers, please!" —and outside on the tarmac a roaring airplane was warming up its engines. Simon Templar suddenly changed his mind about his destination.

"I will give you thirty thousand guilders for the necklace," said Van Roeper, the little trader of Amsterdam to whom the Saint went with his booty.

"I'll take fifty thousand," said the Saint; and he got it.

He fulfilled another of the qualifications of a successful buccaneer, for he never forgot a face. He had had a vague idea from

the first that he had seen the Deacon somewhere before, but it had not been until that morning, when he woke up, that he had been able to place the amiable solicitor who had been so anxious to enlist his dubious services; and he felt that fortune was very kind to him.

Old Charlie Milton, who had been dragged away from his breakfast to sell him the facsimile for eighty pounds, felt much the same.

INSTRUCTIONS TO A SECRET AGENT

Fouché, Minister of Police under Napoleon, was negotiating for a separate peace with the British behind the Emperor's back. One day he called to see Urbain Leroi, a young man he had been saving for this moment. He was sending him to England.

"Here are authentic documents which prove you to be the descendant of one of the noblest families in Dauphine. Do not be afraid that your namesake will dispute your rank and title; he has been dead these dozen years, and his father, mother, uncles are in their graves. You must repair to Havre, with this passport, which purports to be delivered by me to the ex-Vicomte de D——. When you get to Havre, read this note, which will direct you in what way you are to proceed to England. On your arrival in London, go immediately to the minister for foreign affairs. As soon as you are in his presence, address to him these two lines:

Bonne ou mauvaise santé,
Fait notre philosophie.

And then add, 'this couplet is not by Homer, but by M. Dubois.' The minister will then understand that you are my avowed agent, and you will be permitted to remain in London. You will next deliver to the minister a letter and a packet, which will be left for you at Soho Square, where you are to reside."

Two months after young Leroi's return he was dead. He had been suffering, as his doctor put it, "from a severe derangement of the gastric organs." Fouché never trusted people....

death in the valley

by . . . Clifford Knight

NOBODY in town knew anything about the killing until that morning when Johnny Elderkin drove in alone to the sheriff's office, and said that he had killed Lola Carpenter. Johnny was big and tall and blond like the rest of the Elderkins; he was not quite seventeen years old.

Sheriff Ed Petri asked, "When was this, Johnny?"

Johnny said, "Yesterday—about sundown."

"Out at the ranch?"

"Yes, sir."

"Accidental?"

"No, sir."

"Why did you do it?"

"I didn't like her."

They sent out and brought the girl's body in. After that Ed Petri came up from the courthouse to talk to my grandfather. For grandfather was a doctor and he'd have to examine the body. Ed didn't sit down, although he was asked to. He told us the story he'd got from Johnny. Ed Petri was a tall man and the Lord had planned him

"When I rushed out she was dead on the path to the house. Charlie Elderkin stood over the body."

Clifford Knight, who needs no introduction to any mystery reader, describes the situation presented when Johnny Elderkin confessed that he had killed Lola Carpenter, and there seemed to be some doubt as to whether he really had done so. Her father had heard her scream—and had one idea about who the murderer was. Old Doctor Fletcher continued to probe gently until he arrived at the really startling answer. . . .

for a thin one, but all his life he'd been a glutton and he was now barrel-like through the middle and his face was a puffy, unhealthy red.

"Patients of your's ain't they, Doc? That family?"

"Johnny's mother is. Heart case." He didn't say anything more, but being a doctor he would be thinking how all this might affect his patient. "She's bad off," he added.

"The boy should have thought about his mother before he killed the girl," Ed said, as if he could guess what my grandfather was thinking. "The girl was the hired man's daughter, you know. Lived in the family all her life, pret' near."

"I know that." My grandfather was a quiet, thoughtful man, taller than Ed Petri, and he'd gone gray early in life, so that his hair was nearly white, although his face and figure were those of a man years younger. He was thinking now, but there was no clue to his thoughts in his clear blue eyes.

Ed waited for him to say something else, then when there was no further word he said, "They tell me the family is high and mighty in their own way of thinking, Doc; like they're something special and above the common run of ranchers in the valley. Proud, I mean. That's the way I get it. But how do you figure, Doc, since you know the family; is there something wrong with Johnny? I mean is there a screw loose? Young kid like him killing a girl just because he didn't like her. That's what he claims."

"Johnny's all right," said my grandfather.

"Then why?"

"Things sometimes have to happen, Ed. There's nothing you can do about it."

"Then you was expecting this?"

Grandfather took him up sharply, "I didn't say that!" The sheriff's question had nettled him; it was as if he were being accused of foreknowledge of a crime and not warning the sheriff about it. "I didn't say that at all!"

"All right, all right, Doc; don't get me wrong. I didn't aim to speak out of turn if that's the way it sounded. But you said—"

"I said that sometimes things have to happen."

"That's what I thought you said."

"Only—" and my grandfather looked off into space—"only I think the wrong thing's happened here."

"The wrong thing? How do you figure that, Doc?" Ed's eyes were puzzled.

"The girl was harmless."

"Maybe so. But he says he killed her. He's expecting to be

hung for it. Kinda in a hurry about it too."

"It's the wrong generation." My grandfather was speaking as if to himself.

"I've got the boy in jail, and I've got to keep him there."

"Where's the body?" asked grandfather, bringing an end to the thing.

"Tyler's funeral parlor."

"I'll make an examination."

We went out to the ranch that afternoon. It was a long way, almost at the lower end of the valley. The big weather-beaten ranchhouse was in a small stand of tall old cottonwoods, huddled like there was something they were trying to hide; the barn and the sheds stood out in the open, and beyond them were deep green fields of alfalfa that seemed to reach clear to the foothills and the range that lifted high and blue into the sky behind them.

"Charlie Elderkin is a queer one," said my grandfather as we drove in from the highway. "He and Carpenter have stuck together since they were boys. Followed the sea for a while—the two of them together. He left his wife and the boys, who were little then, all alone here on the ranch. Walked out on her. She made the ranch what it is." He was speaking of Johnny Elderkin's father and Carpenter, the hired man, whose daughter had been slain. "Hunting something, I guess," he mused. "The things no man can ever find."

"Hunting what?" I asked.

My grandfather looked at me as if I'd overheard him thinking to himself when I shouldn't. "Oh—romance—ways to get out of the trap of wife and family and responsibilities—a special kind of freedom no man can find, because it doesn't exist."

The sheriff's car pulled up behind ours in the ranch yard. Petri had brought Johnny out with him at my grandfather's suggestion. I had been here at the ranch before. For often I drove around with my grandfather on his sick calls. Grandfather went into the house to see his patient and I got out and stood about in the yard. I expected to see handcuffs on Johnny, now that he was a criminal, but there wasn't. Ed Petri said when they got out of the sheriff's car, "Don't go too far away, Johnny," and Ed then began to look around for the men. There was hammering down in the sheds as if somebody was at work on a tractor, and he went down that way.

Johnny and I sat on the edge of the porch and Spot came up from the fields where he had been hunting and tried to get into Johnny's lap and Johnny said, "Down, Spot!" and Spot sat on the ground, his tail sweeping the dust, his eyes staring

hungrily up at Johnny, and now and then making little eager whining sounds in his throat.

"Did you really shoot her?" I asked, scared at the sound of my own voice. Johnny was older than I and I'd never talked much with him.

After a long while he said, "Yes. With the twenty-two rifle."

"What for?"

"Well—" He didn't speak again for several moments. "I guess I just did it—I didn't like her."

His teeth chattered, and he drew in a sort of spasmodic whispering breath, then he said, "Lola and Ben wanted to get married."

Ben was the oldest of the four Elderkin sons. He and Johnny were the only ones at home now; the two middle boys were away at the university.

When my grandfather came out of the house he was displeased and anxious. He didn't say anything, though, for a few moments. Johnny looked at him hopefully.

"How'd your mother get upstairs, Johnny?" Grandfather's voice was sharp.

"I don't know, Doctor Fletcher. By herself, I guess."

"She belongs downstairs where she was. When did she go up there?"

"Ye-yesterday, I guess. She could walk—"

"Walk, yes; not climb stairs."

"Oh," said Johnny, subsiding. Then he said, as if in defense of her, "It's her room. She's always liked it up there. I could carry her down—"

"She's too sick to be moved."

"Oh." Johnny closed his mouth to a thin white line and looked away.

The hammering down in the sheds now had stopped. Ed Petri came up the path from the barn. With him was Johnny's father. He was bigger—older, of course—than Johnny. He was a man and Johnny was still a boy; that was about the only difference between them. My grandfather shook hands with him.

"Doctor Fletcher," the rancher said with a courteous nod of his head. "I'm glad to see you. How did you find my wife?"

Grandfather moved his head slowly from side to side. "Not too good, Elderkin."

"Now, let's talk about this thing that's happened here," said Sheriff Petri officially, taking charge. "Just how did it happen, now?" He was looking at Johnny. "Show me, boy, just how you did it."

"Well—" Johnny's voice was low and a bit shaky. "She was coming up the path there from the barn, and I just pulled up and—shot her." He lifted his empty arms, holding an imaginary gun.

"Just where on the path was she?"

"The other side of that last cottonwood—about ten feet beyond, I guess."

"You'd been settin' here on the edge of this porch with your rifle in your hand, waiting for her? Is that it, boy? Waiting to kill her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is that so, Elderkin?" Sheriff Petri turned to Johnny's father.

In response Mr. Elderkin sort of shrugged his shoulders, and his big hands hanging at his sides lifted part way, as if all he could say if he were to speak was, "You have heard my son." But he spoke no word. He looked very sad.

"Why, now, Johnny? Tell me why you did it," said Petri, turning back to the boy.

"She and Ben were planning to get married."

"I thought you said you did it because you didn't like her."

"It's both things, I guess," said Johnny, hesitantly.

"You wanted to marry her yourself—is that it?"

"No, sir. I didn't ever want to marry anybody—not her especially."

"Is that so, Elderkin—about Lola and Ben wanting to get married?" Sheriff Petri turned once more to Johnny's father.

"Yes. They did want to marry."

"Were you opposed to it—like Johnny here?"

"I was opposed to it, yes, sir. I forbade it." He spoke as good and precise English as a schoolmaster.

"Oh—why?"

"Well—" and Mr. Elderkin looked off across the fields of alfalfa to the foothills and the mountains beyond them. "Well—it requires plain speaking in view of what has happened. While we all were fond of Lola, the girl was a half-breed. Her mother was Polynesian. I could not permit her marriage to my son." He closed his mouth firmly, and there was a sense of pride of family in his manner.

I thought of what my grandfather had said driving out, that Elderkin and his hired man, Carpenter, who was Lola's father, together had once followed the sea; how Mr. Elderkin had been trying to run away from the trap of responsibilities that life put upon a man, hoping to find a freedom that never could be. And I could understand how it was, perhaps, that this daughter of Carpenter and a Polynesian woman, who was long since dead, had come to be part of the Elderkin household.

But here we were at the moment all of us in an inland valley in California, on a ranch, and the romance of the sea and

far away places of freedom was something out of the long ago which now was forever lost. And Elderkin was faced up with the fact that murder had been done and his own son had confessed his guilt. I wondered as he stood there tall and quiet in his pride of family if he were conscious of how hard the trap had now closed upon him. His son confessed of murder, his wife on her death bed—if I could read my grandfather's manner — the hired man's daughter, who must have been a living symbol of a romantic era in his life, a murder victim.

"Were you standing on the porch or sitting down, Johnny?" my grandfather asked of a sudden. "When you pulled the trigger?"

"Si-itting, sir."

"Was Lola walking erect or was she stooping forward when you fired?"

"Just natural, Doctor—I mean erect."

"She was unusually tall for a girl," observed my grandfather. "Tall like you, Johnny. The bullet struck near the collar bone and ranged downward into the heart."

"Yes, sir."

"Where's the gun?" My grandfather's voice was stern, but not unkind.

Johnny got up and went into the house and we waited silently for him to come back. He returned soon, holding the small rifle before him, and walked gravely up to my grandfather with it.

Grandfather took it, turned it about in his hands thoughtfully and then began to search in his right hand pants pocket. He brought out a lead bullet and for a moment held it in his palm for all to see. "This is the bullet that killed her," he said. Then as we drew closer about him he tried to fit it into the end of the gun barrel.

It didn't fit.

Johnny's pale face slowly grew red. Nobody spoke for a long moment, then grandfather said in a kindly tone, "You lied, didn't you, Johnny?"

"Yes, sir," the boy answered in a tight voice.

"You didn't kill her."

"No, sir, I didn't." He started away and Sheriff Petri grabbed him by the arm.

He said, "If you didn't, boy, who did?"

Johnny shook his head dumbly. The next moment he jerked loose and started off down the path. Spot sprang up to follow and went gaily along with him as if this were to be a carefree excursion into the fields for man and dog.

We stood a silent, wondering group under the rustling canopy of cottonwood leaves, watching Johnny's tall straight figure move off along the path. My

grandfather broke the silence. "Elderkin, did you know that your son was lying?"

Again the heavy shoulders moved, the big hands lifted slightly from his sides, but this time he spoke.

"I assume," Elderkin answered slowly, thoughtfully, "that he believed he had to make a choice. There are times, unfortunately, when it's important that a lie be made to wear the bright garments of truth. A man must decide these things for himself."

"But a lie, Elderkin," my grandfather protested, "is not more important than a man's life. He might have been hanged."

"Johnny didn't see it that way, Doctor."

Sheriff Petri said impatiently, "Then who killed her, Elderkin? Somebody sure as hell did. Tell me who."

Elderkin seemed to draw up to greater height and his face took on even grimmer lines. It was plain that he had been shaken more than he would admit by this turn of events. "I have no conclusions," he said stiffly.

"Who could have done it, if the boy didn't?"

"I am well aware that the shadow of this thing is on my household, Petri. I have reached no conclusions."

A small figure was coming up the path from the barn, carrying pails of milk. He walked stooped from the weight of the pails, which made him appear even smaller than he was. It was Carpenter, the father of the slain girl, lifelong companion to the big man.

He passed us at a little distance, going steadily, doggedly toward the kitchen door. He looked up briefly as he approached, then his eyes dropped and he ignored us. But the brief glance which had only Elderkin for its target shocked me as nothing else had ever done before in my life. It made my scalp cold. For I had never seen such malevolence, such downright evil in a man's face. It was directed at Elderkin and him alone. The big man saw it but his only response was a thin dry smile that moved subtly through sarcasm to contempt.

Sheriff Petri didn't see this, for his back was turned to Carpenter. But my grandfather saw it and he looked confused and at a loss as if he had been struck a blow. The shock in my case, I think, was due much to the imagined friendship of years standing I had conceived to be between them, a fast friendship that had kept them together. It did not exist—they had been held together instead by hatred.

"Was that Carpenter?" said Petri, catching a glimpse of the hired man at the kitchen door

as the screen slammed upon him and his pails of fresh milk.

"Yes," said Elderkin.

"Carpenter!" bawled the sheriff. "Carpenter, come here." He turned to me and said, "Michael, go get Carpenter; I want to talk to him."

I went in some trepidation to the kitchen door. "Mr. Carpenter," I called through the screen, "you're wanted."

He came to the door and said, "Hello, Mike," and he was friendly and good-humored with me as he always had been, so that I wondered if I had been mistaken about what I had seen only a few minutes before. We walked together over to the group.

"Carpenter," said Sheriff Petri unfeelingly, "you tell us what you know about this killing."

The hired man didn't look at Elderkin and he in turn was ignored by the latter. They both gave their attention to the sheriff.

"Mr. Sheriff," replied the hired man, "I have nothing to say in the matter."

"Your daughter has been killed; haven't you any ideas about who did it and why?"

" 'Why?' " said Carpenter, selecting the word and turning it over in his mind like one savoring a rare morsel of food. " 'Why?' That is beyond me, Mr. Sheriff—"

"Who then? Do you have any suspicions?"

" 'Suspicions?' " Again he savored the sheriff's word. "When there's murder, Mr. Sheriff, suspicion is, of course, everywhere—and perhaps nowhere. We are all suspect in varying degrees, of course—"

"I didn't ask for a speech," said Petri harshly. "Do you or don't you know who did the killing?"

"No," said Carpenter shortly, and closed his lips tightly. "I know nothing. I am only the hired man." He closed up now like a surly, resentful clam. I had a feeling that he was lying. He certainly must have had suspicions. I felt that if he were pressed he'd name Elderkin, but that he wouldn't do so unless cornered. For I couldn't forget that look of malevolence as if he blamed the big rancher for this catastrophe that had befallen him.

At this moment a small fat woman came out of the kitchen door and waddled rapidly toward us—a neighbor woman, I learned, who had come to help out.

"Doctor," she called to my grandfather in a high, fat voice, "Doctor — come quick — Mrs. Elderkin—" She was puffing from exertion, beads of sweat stood on her round, pig-like face.

My grandfather strode toward her, and Elderkin fell in behind him. A crisis had occurred with the sick woman. They all went into the house through the kitchen door.

Nothing happened for a long time. Carpenter walked off and Sheriff Petri and I sat on the front steps and watched the sun go down behind the mountains, and saw dusk begin to darken the fields. The fat neighbor woman came to the door behind us and said, "You folks, come and eat now."

Johnny hadn't returned, but the oldest son, Ben, had come up from the barn. He was bigger than his father, he was silent, barely speaking when addressed. I thought that the death of Lola must have been a great blow to him, making him more silent than usual.

My grandfather and Mr. Elderkin already were at the table eating when Petri and I sat down. Nobody spoke, for the shadow of death was upon the house anew. For I could read my grandfather; it was in Elderkin's eyes and in his manner. Death was waiting upstairs.

As we ate silently, with only now and then the clink of a knife on china, there came the sound of a car in the ranch yard. The sound moved away, dying far off in the deepening dusk.

"Who's that?" asked Petri.

Elderkin started and put down his knife and fork. Ben said, "It's Carpenter; he's pulling out."

"Carpenter!" said Petri, pushing back in his chair.

"For good, Ben?" asked Elderkin.

"He said he was going for good. A while ago he said it."

"It would come to that," mused Elderkin. "Yes, it would come to that."

Sheriff Petri drank off his coffee almost at a gulp, picked up a piece of bread he'd spread with jam, and said, "Excuse me, folks. Carpenter pulling out like this spells something to me. It's the break I been lookin' for." He rushed outside and we heard his motor roar, and then the sound of his car faded rapidly.

"That sheriff's a fool," said my grandfather, and went on eating steadily.

We were to sleep that night in Carpenter's room, my grandfather and I, when it should come time. It was on the second floor a few doors down the hall from the sick room. Elderkin had offered it when grandfather had said he shouldn't leave his patient.

The evening was long and depressing. And silent, too, almost like a tomb after the fat neighbor woman drove off home. Nobody wanted to talk. Johnny came back and foraged

for food in the kitchen for himself and Spot, then went upstairs to his room after putting the dog out. And still it was not yet nine o'clock.

At last grandfather came down from the sick room, leaving Ben to sit with his mother. Elderkin looked up from a little desk in a corner of the living room where he appeared to be going over accounts. It was a questing glance that seemed to inquire, "Any change, Doctor?"

My grandfather stood tall in the room, tamping tobacco in his pipe. He said, "It will not be long." He looked sharply at Elderkin who made no reply. Then when it was certain the big man was not going to speak, he went on, "Elderkin, I've not understood your attitude in your wife's illness, now that she's on her death bed."

"My attitude?"

"Why so damned matter of fact about it? You seem to be waiting for it to happen, calmly—instead of fearing it. Instead of urging me, beseeching me to do something to save her life—which I can't save—you sit calmly going over accounts."

"My attitude, my feelings, are my own, Doctor. You are employed to attend my wife's illness."

My grandfather ignored the thrust. He said, "Your son John sought to dress a lie—to use your phrase—in the bright garments of truth. You would have let him hang, if I read your manner, without bothering to get at the bottom of this thing."

"Isn't all this in the sheriff's domain, Doctor Fletcher?" asked Elderkin without feeling, without even raising his voice.

"The sheriff's a fool. And you forget that a physician is more than a pill roller. There's sickness here in my patient, and I'm not referring to her failing heart. A sickness not of the mind, but of the spirit. Your son John and his mother in the past have been very close, have they not?"

"He is her youngest."

"Knowing his mother is going to die soon, yet he drives to town to the sheriff to confess and be hanged for a murder he didn't commit."

"He had thought the thing out—" said Elderkin gently, "as well as he could, being yet a boy."

My grandfather struck a match and sucked the flame into the bowl of his pipe. He shook out the burning match and put it down in an ashtray. He took something from his pocket and held it out to Elderkin who looked but did not offer to take it.

When Elderkin didn't speak, grandfather said, "It's a snapshot of Carpenter and you. And a Polynesian woman."

I got up from my chair to look at the old stained picture. The three were standing on a beach beside an outrigger canoe, their backs to a grove of cocanut palms. Elderkin towered over Carpenter and over the woman who was about Carpenter's height, and who seemed hardly more than a girl. She was obviously a native.

"Was she Lola's mother?" my grandfather asked, referring to the woman in the snapshot.

"Yes."

"I found this underneath your wife's pillow a while ago when I lifted her."

"I hadn't seen it for a long time," said Elderkin, meaning the picture. "A long time."

I wondered why grandfather brought it up at a time like this; perhaps he was puzzled at finding it where he did and was hoping Elderkin could explain. But he did not press for an explanation.

A silence fell upon us which was broken by Spot. In the darkness outside he eerily gave tongue to a long mournful howl. In a moment he was answered by the far off howling of a dog on a neighboring ranch. Then I heard the yapping of a coyote in the nearby foot hills. The thing made me cold.

Elderkin sat at his desk musing, I presumed, upon the past. My grandfather stood in the center of the room smoking thoughtfully. I became aware of sounds outside. The soft purr of a motor ceased. A car door slammed. There were footsteps, then voices. The footsteps approached the porch, and moved across it to the door, and I perceived through the screen door the dim fat figure of the sheriff.

"Hello," he said brightly, triumphantly, "I caught up with Carpenter."

The sheriff then jerked the screen door open and came inside, followed by the hired man.

My grandfather did not turn around, but looked over his shoulder at the pair. He spoke to Carpenter.

"You decided not to run away after all—is that it?"

"I wasn't running away," retorted the man. "Things had just come to an end here for me. That's all."

My grandfather grunted. "You shouldn't have gone, leaving this thing unsettled."

"That's why I brought him back, Doc," said Sheriff Petri, speaking as if all his problems were now solved.

"He's ready to talk. He'll spill what he knows. You promised you would," Petri turned menacingly on the small man standing at his side.

My grandfather took over instead of letting the sheriff proceed. He said to Carpenter, "Do you know who killed Lola?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see it happen?"

"No, sir. I heard it. Heard her scream. Heard the shot."

"Which came first, the scream or the shot? Be exact."

"The scream."

"Were there words, or was it just a scream?"

"There were words; she screamed them."

"What were the words?"

" 'Mr. Elderkin! Don't!' "

My grandfather paused as if to digest what he had heard. Then he said, "You were close enough to hear this, yet you didn't see the murder?"

"That's right, sir; I was in the machine shed. When I rushed out she was dead on the path to the house. Charlie Elderkin stood over the body."

"Do you wish to draw conclusions, Carpenter? Now?" My grandfather's voice was stern. "Are you prepared to make an accusation?"

"Yes, sir—I accuse you, Charlie Elderkin!" And he pointed a finger dramatically at the big man at the desk.

Nobody said anything for a moment. A terror began to grow in me, for Elderkin was looking at his accuser as if in the next moment he'd spring upon him and tear him apart with his hands.

"Hold it," said my grandfather gently, and the tension eased. Then he addressed Elderkin. "Where were you when the shot was fired?"

"On the path; near Lola."

"Did you hear the words that Carpenter says she screamed?"

"He's correct in that."

Johnny had come downstairs and stood in the room. He was barefooted and wore only a pair of pants. I think he'd heard all that had been said since the sheriff brought Carpenter back.

"But you didn't kill her."

"I didn't—"

"I made a statement," said my grandfather testily. "I didn't ask you a question." He looked at Johnny for a long moment, then he said to the boy, "If your father had killed Lola you wouldn't have gone to town saying that you had done it."

Johnny seemed startled by the assertion, and then slowly he nodded his head in a sort of hypnotic agreement.

"You see, Elderkin," said grandfather, turning to Johnny's father, "he wouldn't dress a lie for you." He went on, speaking to all of us. "There's a point I want to emphasize. The bullet entered the girl's body near the collar bone, without striking it, and ranged downward and into the heart. It wouldn't have done that if Johnny had fired from a sitting position on the porch as he claimed. You were sitting on the porch, though, weren't you, when it happened, Johnny?"

"Yes, sir."

"The shot was fired from overhead—from an upstairs window—wasn't it?"

Johnny shifted his weight on his bare feet—his head bent far over, his eyes looking at the carpet. Suddenly he straightened up. "Yes, sir," he said.

For a moment no one spoke, then grandfather said, "You didn't tell us your father was on the path near to Lola."

"No, sir," said Johnny. The silence fell again. My grandfather was looking steadily at Johnny's father, and in a moment Johnny's father spoke in a tone of self defense, of justification, "Really, I—I didn't know where the bullet came from. Everything was confused in my mind. Lola screamed. It startled me. She was struck; the murder had been done. Johnny could have fired the shot from the porch and I wouldn't have known it. I believed him when he said he had done it. You see—"

"There's a rifle upstairs—under my patient's bed," said grandfather interrupting. "The bullet I have fits it."

My backbone grew cold as I stood with the others waiting for someone to speak.

"Could the blame be yours after all, Elderkin?" said my grandfather, who was speaking as if to himself. "I'll tell you why it might be. You hated Carpenter and he hated you in return. For there was Lola between you two. Lola wasn't Carpenter's daughter, although she was said to be."

Grandfather's eyes were on the hired man, and I saw Carpenter's head nod in agreement. "She wasn't his daughter," he mused. "As she grew up she began to take on the physical appearance of an Elderkin. Big. Big boned. Tall. It was quite obvious." He brought the snapshot out of his pocket and looked at it. "She had her mother's coloring—her father's magnificent size. And so—" his eyes were on Elderkin—"because you'd wronged Carpenter you began to hate him. And he responded with hatred. The girl was between you, and Carpenter began to doubt his own parenthood and become certain of yours, so he stayed on here in a kind of blackmail year after year.

"And my patient, who as I say long has been sick in spirit, lived on and on, watching the thing unfold—never sure, but always fearful of her man's past—a man who tried to run away from his responsibilities in search of a freedom that never was." The voice was like the thin edge of a razor as my grandfather talked, fitting the pieces together.

"And then the truth became certain in my patient's mind when Ben and Lola wanted to

marry. You couldn't permit that, Elderkin. It was unthinkable. But—doubt was swept away, certainty took its place in a sick woman's mind. And so—Elderkin—could it be that you are guilty after all? And that Carpenter is right?

"Isn't the guilt yours? Didn't you set yesterday's tragedy in motion years ago when you wronged your friend—and your own wife?" Elderkin made no response, then after a moment grandfather went on. "You were on the path near the girl, and her cry, 'Mr. Elderkin!' was a warning to you, and the word 'Don't!' was flung to the assassin in the upstairs window. Am I not right in this point, Elderkin?" asked my grandfather sharply.

"I suppose so."

"And she tried to put herself in front of you as a protection—the instinctive loyalty of a girl to her—"

"She didn't know it; she never knew," said Elderkin, with a kind of hoarseness in his voice, making a gesture of protest with his big hands.

"But who do I arrest?" The voice was Sheriff Petri's. The blurted question seemed to jar the room.

"Arrest?" said my grandfather, as if annoyed. "Arrest, Petri? Nobody. Don't be a fool! We have to live in this valley for years and years yet." He was looking at Johnny. "We don't want any scars. Call it a mishap, a mishandling of firearms. An accidental death. She wasn't aiming at Lola, you understand—"

"But—"

There came a sound from upstairs. Heavy footfalls, then a voice that seemed to bellow fearfully—Ben's voice—at the head of the stairs calling,

"Doctor!— Doctor Fletcher! Come quick!"

Simon Templar admitted that he was a catalyst. Half the time he didn't have to do anything except simply be around. Somebody would hear he was the Saint—and the fireworks would start!

THE GENTLE LADIES, a new Saint story by LESLIE CHARTERIS

in the next SAINT

the crime in nobody's room

by . . . Carter Dickson

"He intended no murder," said Colonel March, but—as a practical man, he had to kill him.

BANDS were playing and seven suns were shining; but this took place entirely in the head and heart of Mr. Ronald Denham. He beamed on the car-park attendant at the Regency Club, who assisted him into the taxi. He beamed on the taxi-driver. He beamed on the night porter who helped him out at his flat in Sloane Street, and he felt an irresistible urge to hand banknotes to everyone in sight.

Now, Ronald Denham would have denied that he had taken too many drinks. It was true that he had attended an excellent bachelor party, to celebrate Jimmy Bellchester's wedding. But Denham would have maintained that he was upheld by spiritual things; and he had proved his exalted temperance by leaving the party at a time when many of the guests were still present.

As he had pointed out in a speech, it was only a month before his own wedding to Miss Anita Bruce. Anita, in fact, lived in the same block of flats and

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Carter Dickson, equally well-known as John Dickson Carr, occupies a unique place in the field. No writer disagrees with Leslie Charteris' own reaction that, "In the field of the finest and purest type of puzzle the incomparably best stories I have ever read are those of Carter Dickson." Colonel March, head of the "ragbag" department at Scotland Yard, returns to these pages in another puzzle, a very civilized puzzle, the story of a considerate murderer.

From the book entitled THE DEPARTMENT OF QUEER COMPLAINTS
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on the same floor as himself. This fact gave him great pleasure on the way home. Like most of us, Denham in this mood felt a strong urge to wake people up in the middle of the night and talk to them. He wondered whether he ought to wake up Anita. But in his reformed state he decided against it, and felt like a saint. He would not even wake up Tom Evans, who shared the flat with him—though that stern young business man usually worked so late at the office that Denham got in before he did.

At a few minutes short of midnight, then, Denham steered his way into the foyer of Medici Court. Pearson, the night porter, followed him to the automatic lift.

"Everything all right, sir?" inquired Pearson in a stage whisper. Denham assured him that it was, and that he was an excellent fellow.

"You—er—don't feel like singing, do you sir?" asked Pearson with some anxiety.

"As a matter of fact," said Denham, who had not previously considered this, "I do. You are full of excellent ideas, Pearson. But let us sing nothing improper, Pearson. Let it be something of noble sentiment, like—"

"Honestly, sir," urged Pearson, "if it was me, I wouldn't do it. *He's* upstairs, you know. We thought he was going to Manchester this afternoon, to stay a week, but he changed his mind. He's upstairs now."

This terrible hint referred to the autocrat of Medici Court, Cellini Court, Bourbon Court, and half a dozen other great hives. Sir Rufus Armingdale, high khan of builders, not only filled London with furnished flats which really were the last word in luxury at a low price; he showed his pride in his own merchandise by living in them.

"No special quarters for me," he was quoted as saying, with fist upraised for emphasis. "No castle in Surrey or barracks in Park Lane. Just an ordinary flat; and not the most expensive of 'em either. That's where I'm most comfortable, and that's where you'll find me."

Considering all the good things provided in Armingdale's Furnished Flats, even his autocratic laws were not much resented. Nor could anyone resent the fact that all the flats in a given building were furnished exactly alike, and that the furniture must be kept in the position Rufus Armingdale gave it. Medici Court was "Renaissance," as Bourbon Court was "Louis XV": a tower of rooms like luxurious cells, and only to be distinguished from each other by an ornament on a table or a picture on a wall.

But Sir Rufus's leases even discouraged pictures. Considering that he was something of an

art-collector himself, and had often been photographed in his own flat with his favorite Greuze or Corot, some annoyance was felt at this. Sir Rufus Armingdale did not care. You either leased one of his flats or you didn't. He was that sort of man.

Otherwise, of course, Ronald Denham's adventure could not have happened. He returned from the bachelor party; he took Pearson's advice about the singing; he went up in the automatic lift to the second floor; and he walked into what the champagne told him was his own flat.

That he went to the second floor is certain. Pearson saw him put his finger on the proper button in the lift. But nothing else is certain, since the hall upstairs was dark. Pushing open a door—either his key fitted it or the door was open—Denham congratulated himself on getting home.

Also, he was a little giddy. He found himself in the small foyer, where lights were on. After a short interval he must have moved into the sitting-room, for he found himself sitting back in an armchair and contemplating familiar surroundings through a haze. Lights were turned on here as well: yellow-shaded lamps, one with a pattern like a dragon on the shade.

Something began to trouble him. There was something odd, he thought, about those lamp-shades. After some study, it occurred to him that he and Tom Evans hadn't any lamp-shades like that. They did not own any bronze book-ends either. As for the curtains . . .

Then a picture on the wall swam out of oblivion, and he stared at it. It was a small dull-colored picture over the sideboard. And it penetrated into his mind at last that he had got into the wrong flat.

Everything now showed itself to him as wrong; it was as though a blur had come into focus.

"Here, I'm sorry!" he said aloud, and got up.

There was no reply. The heinousness of his offense partly steadied him. Where in the name of sanity was he? There were only three other flats on the second floor. One of these was Anita Bruce's. Of the others one was occupied by a brisk young newspaper man named Conyers, and the other by the formidable Sir Rufus Armingdale.

Complete panic caught him. He felt that at any moment a wrathful occupant might descend on him, to call him a thief at worst or a snooper at best. Turning round to scramble for the door, he almost ran into another visitor in the wrong flat.

This visitor sat quietly in a tall chair near the door. He was a thin, oldish, well-dressed man, wearing thick-lensed spectacles,

and his head was bent forward as though in meditation. He wore a soft hat and a thin oilskin waterproof colored green: a jaunty and bilious-looking coat for such a quiet figure. The quiet light made it gleam.

"Please excuse—" Denham began in a rush, and talked for some seconds before he realized that the man had not moved.

Denham stretched out his hand. The coat was one of those smooth, almost seamless American waterproofs, yellowish outside and green inside; and for some reason the man was now wearing it inside out. Denham was in the act of telling him this when the head lolled, the smooth oilskin gleamed again, and he saw that the man was dead.

Tom Evans, stepping out of the lift at a quarter past one, found the hall of the second floor in complete darkness. When he turned on the lights from a switch beside the lift, he stopped short and swore.

Evans, lean and swarthy, with darkish eyebrows merging into a single line across his forehead, looked a little like a Norman baron in a romance. Some might have said a robber baron, for he carried a brief case and was a stern man of business despite his youth. But what he saw now made him momentarily forget his evening's work. The hall showed four doors, with their microscopic black numbers, set some distance apart. Near the door leading to Anita Bruce's flat, Ronald Denham sat hunched on an oak settle. There was a lump at the base of his skull and he was breathing in a way Evans did not like.

It was five minutes more before Denham had been whacked and pounded into semi-consciousness; and to such a blinding headache that its pain helped to revive him. First he became aware of Tom's lean, hook-nosed face bending over him, and Tom's usual fluency at preaching.

"I don't mind you getting drunk," the voice came to him dimly. "In fact, I expected it. But at least you ought to be able to carry your liquor decently. What the devil have you been up to, anyway? Hoy!"

"He had his raincoat on inside out," was the first thing Denham said.

Then memory came back to him like a new headache or a new explosion, and he began to pour out the story.

"—and I tell you there's a dead man in one of those flats! I think he's been murdered. Tom, I'm not drunk; I swear I'm not. Somebody sneaked up behind and bashed me over the back of the head just after I found him."

"Then how did you get out here?"

"Oh, God, how should I know? Don't argue; help me up. I suppose I must have been dragged out here. If you don't believe me, feel the back of my head. Just feel it."

Evans hesitated. He was always practical, and there could be no denying the bruise. He looked uncertainly up and down the hall.

"But who is this dead man?" he demanded. "And whose flat is he in?"

"I don't know. It was an oldish man with thick glasses and a green raincoat. I never saw him before. Looked a bit like an American, somehow."

"Nonsense! Nobody wears a green raincoat."

"I'm telling you, he was wearing it inside out. If you ask me why, I'm going to bat my head against the wall and go to sleep again." He wished he could do this, for he could not see straight and his head felt like a printing-press in full blast. "We ought to be able to identify the flat easily enough. I can give a complete description of it—"

He paused, for two doors had opened simultaneously in the hall. Anita Bruce and Sir Rufus Armingdale came out, in different stages of anger or curiosity at the noise.

If Evans had been more of a psychologist, he might have anticipated the effect this would have on them. As it was, he stood looking from one to the other, thinking whatever thoughts you care to attribute to him. For he was an employee of Sir Rufus, as manager of the Sloane Square office of Armingdale Flats, and he could not afford to risk any trouble.

Anita seemed to take in the situation at a glance. She was small, dark, plump and fluffy-haired. She was wearing a négligé and smoking a cigarette. Seeing the expressions of the other three she removed the cigarette from her mouth in order to smile. Sir Rufus Armingdale did not look so much formidable as fretful. He had one of those powerful faces whose features seem to have run together like a bull-pup's. But the old dressing-gown, fastened up at the throat as though he were cold, took away the suggestion of an autocrat and made him only a householder.

He breathed through his nose, rather helplessly, until he saw an employee. His confidence returned.

"Good morning, Evans," he said. "What's the meaning of this?"

Evans risked it. "I'm afraid it's trouble, sir. Mr. Denham—well, he's found a dead man in one of the flats."

"Ron!" cried Anita.

"A dead man," repeated Armingdale, without surprise. "Where?"

"In one of the flats. He does not know which."

"Oh? Why doesn't he know which?"

"He's got a frightful bump on the back of his head," said Anita, exploring. She looked back over her shoulder and spoke swiftly. "It's quite all right, Tom. Don't get excited. He's d-r-u-n-k."

"I am not drunk," said Denham, with tense and sinister calmness. "May I also point out that I am able to read and write, and that I have not had words spelled out in front of me since I was four years old? Heaven give me s-t-r-e-n-g-t-h! I tell you, I can describe the place."

He did so. Afterwards there was a silence. Anita, her eyes shining curiously, dropped her cigarette on the autocrat's hardwood floor and ground it out. The autocrat seemed too abstracted to notice.

"Ron, old dear," Anita said, going over and sitting down beside him, "I'll believe you if you're as serious as all that. But you ought to know it isn't *my* flat."

"And I can tell you it isn't mine," grunted Armingdale. "There certainly isn't a dead man in it. I've just come from there, and I know."

If they had not known Armingdale's reputation so well, they might have suspected him of trying to make a joke. But his expression belied it as well. It was heavy and lowering, with more than a suggestion of the bull-pup.

"This picture you say you saw," he began. "The one over the sideboard. Could you describe it?"

"Yes, I think so," said Denham desperately. "It was a rather small portrait of a little girl looking sideways over some roses, or flowers of some kind. Done in that grayish-brown stuff; I think they call it sepia."

Armingdale stared at him.

"Then I know it isn't mine," he said. "I never owned a sepia drawing in my life. If this young man is telling the truth, there's only one flat left. I think I shall just take the responsibility of knocking, and—"

His worried gaze moved down towards the door of the flat occupied by Mr. Hubert Conyers, of the *Daily Record*. But it was unnecessary to knock at the door. It opened with such celerity that Denham wondered whether anyone had been looking at them through the slot of the letter-box; and Hubert Conyers stepped out briskly. He was an unobtrusive, sandy-haired little man, very different from Denham's idea of a journalist. His only extravagance was a taste for blended shadings in his clothes, from suit to shirt to necktie; though he usually contrived to look rumpled. He was

always obliging, and as busy as a parlor clock. But his manner had a subdued persuasiveness which could worm him through narrower places than you might have imagined.

He came forward drawing on his coat, and with a deft gesture he got into the middle of the group.

"Sorry, sorry, sorry," he began, seeming to propitiate everyone at once. "I couldn't help overhearing, you know. Good evening, Sir Rufus. The fact is, it's not my flat either. Just now, the only ornaments in my sitting-room are a lot of well-filled ashtrays and a bottle of milk. Come and see, if you like."

There was a silence, while Conyers looked anxious.

"But it's got to be somebody's flat!" snapped Sir Rufus Armingdale, with a no-nonsense air. "Stands to reason. A whole confounded sitting-room can't vanish like smoke. Unless—stop a bit—unless Mr. Denham got off at some other floor?"

"I don't know. I may have."

"And I don't mind admitting—" said Armingdale, hesitating as everyone looked at him curiously. The autocrat seemed worried. "Very well. The fact is, *I've* got a picture in my flat something like the one Mr. Denham described. It's Greuze's 'Young Girl with Primroses.' But mine's an oil-painting, of course. Mr. Denham is talking about a sepia drawing. That is, if he really saw anything. Does this dead man exist at all?"

Denham's protestations were cut short by the hum of an ascending lift. But it was not the ordinary lift in front of them; it was the service-lift at the end of the hall. The door was opened, and the cage-grating pulled back, to show the frightened face of the night porter.

"Sir," said Pearson addressing Armingdale as though he were beginning an oration. "I'm glad to see *you*, sir. You always tell us that if something serious happens we're to come straight to you instead of the manager. Well, I'm afraid this is serious. I—the fact is, I found something in this lift."

Denham felt that they were being haunted by that phrase, "the fact is." Everybody seemed to use it. He recalled a play in which it was maintained that anyone who began a sentence like this was usually telling a lie. But he had not time to think about this, for they had found the elusive dead man.

The unknown lay on his face in one corner of the lift. A light in the roof of the steel cage shone down on his gray felt hat, on an edge of his thick spectacles, and on his oilskin waterproof. But the coat was no longer green, for he was now

wearing it right-side-out in the ordinary way.

Anita, who had come quietly round beside Denham, seized his arm. The night porter restrained Tom Evans as the latter bent forward.

"I shouldn't touch him, sir, if I was you. There's blood."

"Where?"

Pearson indicated a stain on the gray-rubber floor. "And if I'm any judge, sir, he died of a stab through the heart. I—I lifted him up a bit. But I don't see any kind of knife that could have done it."

"Is this the man you saw?" Armingdale asked Denham quietly.

Denham nodded. Something tangible, something to weigh and handle, seemed to have brought the force back to Armingdale's personality.

"Except," Denham added, "that he's now wearing his raincoat right-side out. Why? Will somebody tell me that? Why?"

"Never mind the raincoat," Anita said close to his ear. "Ron, you don't know him, do you? You'll swear you don't know him?"

He was startled. She had spoken without apparent urgency, and so low that the others might not have heard her. But Denham, who knew her so well, knew that there was urgency behind the unwinking seriousness of her eyes. Unconsciously she was shaking his arm. His wits had begun to clear, despite the pain in his skull; and he wondered.

"NO, of course, I don't know him. Why should I?"

"Nothing! Nothing at all. Ss-t!"

"Well, I know him," said Hubert Conyers.

Conyers had been squatting down at the edge of the lift, and craning his neck to get a close view of the body without touching it. Now he straightened up. He seemed so excited that he could barely control himself, and his mild eye looked wicked.

"I interviewed him a couple of days ago," said Conyers. "Surely you know him, Sir Rufus?"

"Surely, is a large word, young man. No, I do not know him. Why?"

"That's Dan Randolph, the American real-estate king," said Conyers, keeping a watchful eye on Armingdale. "All of you will have heard of him: he's the fellow who always deals in spot cash, even if it's a million. I'd know those spectacles anywhere. He's as near-sighted as an owl. Er—am I correctly informed, Sir Rufus, that he was in England to do some business with you?"

Armingdale smiled bleakly. "You have no information, young man," he said. "And as far as I'm concerned you're not getting any. So that's Dan Ran-

dolph! I knew he was in England; but he's certainly not made any business proposition to me."

"Maybe he was coming to do it."

"Maybe he was," said Armingdale, with the same air of a parent to a child. He turned to Pearson. "You say you found him in that lift. When did you find him? And how did you come to find him?"

Pearson was voluble. "The lift was on the ground floor, sir. I just happened to glance through the little glass panel, and I see him lying there. So I thought I'd better run the lift up here and get you. As for putting him there—" He pointed to the *recall* button on the wall outside the lift. "Somebody on any floor, sir, could have shoved him in there, and pressed this button, and sent him downstairs. He certainly wasn't put in on the ground floor. Besides, I saw him come into the building tonight."

"Oh?" put in Conyers softly. "When was this?"

"Might have been eleven o'clock, sir."

"Who was he coming to see?"

Pearson shook his head helplessly and with a certain impatience. "These ain't service-flats, sir, where you telephone up about every visitor. You ought to know we're not to ask visitors anything unless they seem to need help, or unless it's somebody who has no business here. I don't know. He went up in the main lift, that's all I can tell you."

"Well, what floor did he go to?"

"I dunno." Pearson ran finger under a tight collar. "But excuse me, sir, may I ask a question, if you please? What's wrong exactly?"

"We've lost a room," said Ronald Denham, with inspiration. "Maybe you can help. Look here, Pearson: you've been here in these flats a long time. You've been inside most of them—in the sitting-rooms, for instance?"

"I think I can say I've been in all of 'em, sir."

"Good. Then we're looking for a room decorated like this," said Denham. For the third time he described what he had seen, and Pearson's expression grew to one of acute anguish. At the end of it he shook his head.

"It's nobody's room, sir," the porter answered simply. "There's not a sitting-room like that in the whole building."

At three o'clock in the morning, a sombre group of people sat in Sir Rufus Armingdale's flat, and did not even look at each other. The police work was nearly done. A brisk divisional detective-inspector, accompanied by a sergeant, a photographer, and a large amiable man in a top-hat, had taken a statement from each of those concerned.

But the statements revealed nothing.

Denham, in fact, had received only one more mental jolt. Entering Armingdale's flat, he thought for a second that he had found the missing room. The usual chairs of stamped Spanish leather, the refectory table, the carved gewgaws, greeted him like a familiar nightmare. And over the sideboard hung a familiar picture—that of a small girl looking sideways over an armful of roses.

"That's not it!" said Anita quickly.

"It's the same subject, but it's not the same picture. That's in oils. What sort of game do you suppose is going on in this place?"

Anita glanced over her shoulder. She had dressed before the arrival of the police; and also, he thought, she had put on more make-up than was necessary.

"Quick, Ron; before the others get here. Were you telling the truth?"

"Sure, I was telling the truth. You don't think—?"

"Oh, I don't know and I don't care; I just want you to tell me. Ron, you didn't kill him yourself?"

He had not even time to answer before she stopped him. Sir Rufus Armingdale, Conyers, and Evans came through from the foyer; and with them was the large amiable man who had accompanied Divisional-Inspector Davidson. His name, it appeared, was Colonel March.

"You see," he explained, with a broad gesture, "I'm not here officially. I happened to be at the theater, and I dropped in on Inspector Davidson for a talk, and he asked me to come along. So if you don't like any of my questions, just tell me to shut my head. But I do happen to be attached to the Yard—"

"I know you, Colonel," said Conyers, with a crooked grin. "You're the head of the Ragbag Department, D-3. Some call it the Crazy House."

Colonel March nodded seriously. He wore a dark overcoat, and had a top-hat pushed back on his large head; this, with his florid complexion, sandy mustache, and bland blue eye, gave him something of the look of a stout colonel in a comic paper. He was smoking a large-bowled pipe with the effect of seeming to sniff smoke from the bowl rather than draw it through the stem. He appeared to be enjoying himself.

"It's a compliment," he assured them. "After all, somebody has got to sift all the queer complaints. If somebody comes in and reports (say) that the Borough of Stepney is being terrorized by a blue pig, I've got to decide whether it's a piece of lunacy, or a mistake, or a hoax, or a serious crime. Otherwise

good men would only waste their time. You'd be surprised how many such complaints there are. But I was thinking, and so was Inspector Davidson, that you had a very similar situation here. If you wouldn't mind a few extra questions—"

"As many as you like," said Sir Rufus Armingdale. "Provided somebody's got a hope of solving this damned—"

"As a matter of fact," said Colonel March, frowning, "Inspector Davidson has reason to believe that it is already solved. A good man, Davidson."

There was a silence. Something unintentionally sinister seemed to have gathered in Colonel March's affable tone. For a moment nobody dared to ask him what he meant.

"Already solved?" repeated Hubert Conyers.

"Suppose we begin with you, Sir Rufus," said March with great courtesy. "You have told the inspector that you did not know Daniel Randolph personally. But it seems to be common knowledge that he was in England to see you."

Armingdale hesitated. "I don't know his reasons. He may have been here to see me, among other things. Probably was. He wrote to me about it from America. But he hasn't approached me yet, and I didn't approach him first. It's bad business."

"What was the nature of this business, Sir Rufus?"

"He wanted to buy an option I held on some property in—never mind where. I'll tell you in private, if you insist."

"Was a large sum involved?"

Armingdale seemed to struggle with himself. "Four thousand, more or less."

"So it wasn't a major business deal. Were you going to sell?"

"Probably."

Colonel March's abstracted eye wandered to the picture over the side-board. "Now, Sir Rufus, that Greuze, 'Young Girl with Primroses.' I think it was recently reproduced, in its natural size, as a full-page illustration in the *Metropolitan Illustrated News*?"

"Yes, it was," said Armingdale. He added: "In—sepia."

Something about this afterthought made them all move forward to look at him. It was like the puzzle of a half-truth: nobody knew what it meant.

"Exactly. Just two more questions. I believe that each of these flats communicates with a fire-escape leading down into the mews behind?"

"Yes, what of it?"

"Will the same key open the front door of each of the flats?"

"No, certainly not. All the lock-patterns are different."

"Thank you. Now, Mr. Conyers—a question for you. Are you married?"

Hitherto Conyers had been

regarding him with a look of watchful expectancy, like an urchin about to smash a window and run. Now he scowled.

"Married? No."

"And you don't keep a valet?"

"The answer to that, Colonel, is loud and prolonged laughter. Honestly, I don't like your 'social' manner. Beston, our crime news man, knows you. And it's always, 'Blast you, Beston, if you print one hint about the Thing-gummy case I'll have your hide.' What difference does it make whether I'm married or not, or whether I have a valet or not?"

"A great deal," said March seriously. "Now, Miss Bruce. What is your occupation, Miss Bruce?"

"I'm an interior decorator," answered Anita. She began to laugh. It may have been with a tinge of hysteria; but she sat back in a tall chair and laughed until there were tears in her eyes.

"I'm terribly sorry," she went on, holding out her hand as though to stop them, "but don't you see? The murder was done by an interior decorator. That's the whole secret."

Colonel March cut short Armingdale's shocked protest.

"Go on," he said sharply.

"I thought of it first off. Of course there's no 'vanishing room.' Some sitting-room has just been redecorated. All the actual furnishings, tables and chairs and sideboards, are just the same in every room. The only way you can tell them apart is by small movable things—pictures, lamp-shades, book-ends—which could be changed in a few minutes.

"Ron accidentally walked into the murderer's flat just after the murderer had killed that old man. That put the murderer in a pretty awful position. Unless he killed Ron too, he was caught with the body and Ron could identify his flat. But he thought of a better way. He sent that man's body down in the lift and dragged Ron out into the hall. Then he simply altered the decorations of his flat. Afterwards he could sit down and dare anyone to identify it as the place where the body had been."

Anita's face was flushed with either defiance or fear.

"Warm," said Colonel March. "Unquestionably warm. That is why I was wondering whether you couldn't tell us what really happened."

"I don't understand you."

"Well, there are objections to the redecoration. You've got to suppose that nobody had ever been in the flat before and seen the way it was originally decorated. You've also got to suppose that the murderer could find a new set of lamp-shades, pictures, and book-ends in the middle of the night— Haven't you got it the wrong way round?"

"The wrong way round?"

"Somebody," said March, dropping his courtesy, "prepared a dummy room to begin with. He put in the new lamp-shades, the book-ends, the copy of a well-known picture, even a set of new curtains. He entertained Randolph there. Afterwards, of course, he simply removed the knick-knacks and set the place right again. But it was the dummy room into which Ronald Denham walked. That Mr. Denham, was why you did not recognize—"

"Recognize what?" roared Denham. "Where was I?"

"In the sitting-room of your own flat," said Colonel March gravely. "If you have been sober you might have made a mistake; but you were so full of champagne that your instinct brought you home after all."

There were two doors in the room, and the blue uniform of a policeman appeared in each. At March's signal, Inspector Davidson stepped forward. He said:

"Thomas Evans, I arrest you for the murder of Daniel Randolph. I have to warn you that anything you say will be taken down in writing and may be used in evidence at your trial."

"Oh, look here," protested Colonel March, when they met in Armingdale's flat next day, "the thing was simple enough. We had twice as much trouble over that kid in Bayswater who pinched all the oranges. And you had all the facts.

"Evans, as one of Sir Rufus's most highly placed and trusted employees, was naturally in a position to know all about the projected business deal with Randolph. And so he planned an ingenious swindle. A swindle, I am certain, was all he intended.

"Now you, Sir Rufus, had intended to go to Manchester yesterday afternoon, and remain there for a week. (Mr. Denham heard that from the night porter, when he was advised against singing.) That would leave your flat empty. Evans telephoned to Randolph, posing as you. He asked Randolph to come round to your flat at eleven o'clock at night, and settle the deal. He added that you *might* be called away to Manchester; but, in that event, his secretary would have the necessary papers ready and signed.

"It would have been easy. Evans would get into your empty flat by way of the fire-escape and the window. He would pose as your secretary. Randolph—who, remember, always paid spot cash even if it involved a million—would hand over a packet of bank-notes for a forged document.

"Why should Randolph be suspicious of anything? He knew, as half the newspaper-

reading world knows, that Sir Rufus lived on the second floor of Medici Court. He had seen photographs of Sir Rufus with his favorite Greuze over the sideboard. Even if he asked the hall porter for directions, he would be sent to the right flat. Even if the hall porter said Sir Rufus was in Manchester, the ground had been prepared and Randolph would ask for the secretary.

"Unfortunately, a hitch occurred. Sir Rufus decided not to go to Manchester. He decided it yesterday afternoon, after all Evans's plans had been made and Randolph was due to arrive. But Evans needed that money; as we have discovered today, he needed it desperately."

"So he hit on another plan. Sir Rufus would be at home and his flat could not be used. But, with all the rooms exactly alike except for decorations, why not an *imitation* of Sir Rufus's flat? The same plan would hold good, except that Randolph would be taken to the wrong place. He would come up in the lift at eleven. Evans would be waiting with the door of the flat open, and would take him to a place superficially resembling Sir Rufus's. The numbers on the doors are very small; and Randolph, as we know, was so near-sighted as to be almost blind. If Evans adopted some disguise, however clumsy, he could never afterwards be identified as the man who swindled Randolph. And he ran no risk in using the flat he shared with Denham."

Anita interposed. "Of course!" she said. "Ron was at a bachelor party, and ordinarily it would have kept him there whooping until two or three o'clock in the morning. But he reformed, and came home early."

Denham groaned. "But I still can't believe it," he insisted. "Tom Evans? A murderer?"

"He intended no murder," said Colonel March. "But, you see, Randolph suspected something. Randolph showed that he suspected. And Evans, as a practical man, had to kill him. You can guess why he suspected?"

"Well?"

"Because Evans is color-blind," said Colonel March.

"It's too bad," Colonel March went on, "but the crime was from the first the work of a color-blind man. Now, none of the rest of you could qualify for that deficiency. As for Sir Rufus, I can think of nothing more improbable than a color-blind art-collector—unless it is a color-blind interior decorator. Mr. Conyers here shows by the blended hues of brown or blue in his suits, shirts, and ties that he has a fine eye for color effect; and he possesses no wife or valet, it seems, to choose them for him.

"But Evans? He is not only partially but wholly color-blind.

You gave us a spirited account of it. Randolph's body was sent up in the lift by Pearson. When Evans stepped forward, Pearson warned him not to touch the body, saying that there was blood. Evans said: 'Where?'—though he was staring straight down in a small, brightly lighted lift at a red bloodstain on a gray-rubber floor. Red on any surface except green or yellow is invisible to color-blind men.

"That was also the reason why Randolph's waterproof was put on inside out. Randolph had removed his hat and coat when he first came into the flat. After Evans had stabbed him with a clasp-knife, Evans put the hat and coat back on the body previous to disposing of it. But he could not distinguish between the yellow outside and green inside of that seamless oilskin.

"You, Mr. Denham, let yourself into the flat with your own key: which in itself told us the location of the 'vanished' room, for no two keys are alike. I also think that Miss Bruce could have told us all along where the 'vanished' room was. I am inclined to suspect she saw Randolph going into your flat, and was afraid you might be concerned in the murder."

"Anyway, you spoke to a corpse about his coat being inside out; and Evans rectified the error before he put the body in the lift. He had to knock you out, of course. But he genuinely didn't want to hurt you. He left the building by way of the fire-escape into the mews. He disposed of his stage-properties, though he was foolish enough to keep the money and the clasp-knife on his person, where they were found when we searched him. When he came back here, he used the main lift in the ordinary way as though he were returning from his office. And he was genuinely concerned when he found you still unconscious on the bench in the hall."

There was a silence, broken by Armingdale's snort.

"How did you come to think the murderer must have been color-blind to begin with?"

Colonel March turned to stare at him.

"Don't you see it even yet?" he asked. "That was the starting-point. We suspected it for the same reason Randolph suspected an imposture. Poor old Randolph wasn't an art-critic. Any sort of colored daub, in the ordinary way, he would have swallowed as the original 'Young Girl with Primroses' he expected to see. But Evans didn't allow for the one thing even a near-sighted man does know: color. In his effort to imitate the decorations of Sir Rufus's flat, the fool hung up as an oil-painting nothing more than a sepia reproduction out of an illustrated weekly."

children must learn

by . . . J. Francis McComas

"ARE you a gangster?" the little girl asked. Her tone held only a bright curiosity.

"No!" the man at the wheel said irritably. "Where do you get such crazy ideas!" He checked the speedometer, gave the big Mercury more gas and the needle pushed ninety. "How old are you, anyway?"

"Thirteen. Going on fourteen. I'm small for my age."

"You're kinda dumb for your age, too." He dimmed his lights for a lone truck, heard the suddenly hushed wind as the two vehicles passed. Then, in his rearview mirror he could see only the red line of the truck's warning lights.

"Why do you think I'm dumb?" the girl asked calmly. "Miss Bisley says I'm way above average. She says it's due to my heritage."

He probed for the hole, found it, felt a slow ooze of blood around his fingertips. Not much bleeding, he thought.

"Miss Bisley the one that let that phony aunt take you away? *She* don't sound very bright, herself."

"If *I* know so very little about my relatives, how could one expect Miss Bisley to have more detailed information?"

Writer and editor J. Francis McComas has written a story that is more than the story of the kidnapping of a prominent man's daughter—and what follows. This is a report on a fighting kind of law enforcement—on men who expect and give no quarter—on what happens to a lonely girl when she meets these men.

He shot a quick glance at the small figure sitting erect in the seat beside him. A skinny little towhead . . . awkward, now . . . probably a knockout in another five years, but now. . . . Well, there was one thing—she was so damned *calm*. She'd been kidnapped, then got herself square in the middle of a gun-fight, and now she was doing ninety—no, ninety-five in a souped-up Mercury in the middle of the Arizona desert with a guy she knew only as killer—and she hadn't turned a hair. Not a single damned hair of those yellow, homely braids.

He looked in the mirror again and way back he saw a light. He could do a hundred and twenty in this car—he'd rigged the engine himself, and he knew—and he'd also use a lot of gas. Well, distances were deceptive in the desert . . . they were still at least twenty miles behind him.

"You honestly don't know much about your family?" he asked.

"Just my father. Because he's so famous. Since my mother died—I was but five at the time, the merest baby, you see—I've been at schools. Because father has been so busy."

"Yeah. I know. So when this dame said she was your aunt, you and this Miss Bisley figured she was?"

"Certainly."

"Uh . . . that don't seem fair somehow . . . didn't you and the old man ever see each other vacation-times—or Christmas—or on your birthdays?"

"I'm sure he tried. But there was always the government, you know. Demanding his presence at some experiment—we did think I could go with him to the South Seas where they blew up all those lovely islands, but at the last minute the Army or the Secret Service or somebody said no and he just wrote me a letter and sent me a present."

"What?"

"I really don't remember."

"Uh . . ." *He* could remember when he was ten and had measles and missed the first rabbit drive and the old man anyway gave him the beautiful little .410. "Look," he said, and was a little surprised at the defensive tone of his voice, "it's probably kind of confusing to a kid your age and it sure hasn't been a happy life for you, I guess, but your father is a great man. He's probably the greatest man in the world. And he's sure saved this country's life—a dozen times."

"I know all that. Miss Bisley has been most meticulous to show me clippings from all the newspapers and magazines. Will you excuse me if I make a very personal remark?"

He managed not to laugh but said, gravely enough, "Sure, kid, go ahead."

And in her little girl's voice

that used such big words she said, "You seem singularly well-informed for a gangster."

"Look, honey," he was no longer irritated with the kid, but very interested in her and sort of sad about her, "I told you I wasn't a gangster. Matter of fact, I'm a deputy sheriff."

Although he had damn' near been a gangster—guess he *had* been one, in that wetback business. Funny, how things tied together . . . he'd been too restless to settle down after the war, had got mixed up with Larry Moultrie, had actually worked with a—well, damn it! It *was* a gang! And now, seven years later, simply because he knew what Larry looked like, here he was, a backwoods deputy, trying to bust up the biggest kidnapping in American history.

He checked things front and back. The road ahead was climbing, heading for the last low range before they settled down for the flat run into Phoenix. Behind, the single light was just a tiny bit brighter. And . . . the gas tank showed less than a quarter full.

It had started, he guessed, with old man MacGregor coming to the house that day. Old man MacGregor, whose only boasting was about *his* old man, who'd never taken any lip from the Earps—and that meant Wyatt, too, by Godfrey!—down in Tombstone. Not, y'understand, that the old gentleman thought very highly of the Clantons. . . .

God! his mind was wandering tonight. He glanced at the small figure beside him and wondered if she, born in this country, or her old man, him that went to all the European colleges before he came here and went on record as saying this was the best country, yet . . . did either of them know anything about old Wyatt, or Ike and Billy, or Doc Holliday?

Well, anyway, old man MacGregor simply said, "Franklin, you're one of the rare boys that says he's tough and *is* tough. You'll never quiet down. So, do you want to shift into smuggling dope, and maybe girls, or would you like to be my deputy? Understand me, boy, I'm not asking you any favors. I can still outdraw you with my left hand or, if you want to try a little rough-and-tumble, I'm game. But I remember your pa . . ."

Frank thought a while, largely about his father, and finally he said, "Okay, I'm your man. But I break clean." MacGregor said, "Why not?" And in the bar in Las Virgenes de something-or-other, across the belt of sand that passed for the River ten months of the year, Larry Moultrie said, calmly enough, not trying to argue with him, "I guess you know you couldn't get out

of here alive, if I wanted it that way?" Frank nodded. "Sure, I couldn't. But how many else could?"

Moultrie had chuckled and said, "Go on, kid and good luck to you."

And that was why it had all happened in the roadside barbecue he ran when he wasn't deputying in Nana County. Old man MacGregor, still going strong, called him one night and said simply, "Franklin, this is the most terrible news I have ever heard. Professor Eisenberg's daughter has been kidnaped."

Frank couldn't say anything.

After a while, the old man went on. "It's not a ransom deal, of course. They're trying to get her out of the country, then force her father to join them. He—a wonderful man, Frank—he's reported everything to the government and asked for an armed guard to—to restrain him if he tries to leave. All we know is, they're headed for our part of the border. The Mexican government has been alerted and both sides of the river are being patrolled."

"Hell of a lot of good that will do," said Frank, speaking from experience.

"I know, boy. But both governments will have planes up tomorrow."

"So what do I do, Pop?"

"Keep your mouth shut, boy. And your eyes open. That's all us country boys can do, I reckon."

But he didn't watch out, really. Not even when the big Cad sedan drove up and two men and a woman and a little kid—this one, of course, came in for hamburgers. It was only when he looked at the second, bigger man, took another look and said, "Larry! Larry Moultrie! Why, you old devil, how are you!"

Larry said, "Frank Woodson! Kid—I wouldn't known you. You're getting fat! That's what comes of being a deputy, hey?"

Then the first man that came in said, with a flat, unpleasant accent, "Larry? This man knows you?"

"Sure!" roared Moultrie in the old voice. "Damn right he does—Franklin J. Woodson—

"Be quiet, Larry," the other guy said. "This is all too bad. I am really very sorry."

So then Frank Woodson looked at the first guy, his first real look, and he almost laughed. Where did the damn fool think he was? Didn't he know that people here in the desert and high up, way back in the mountains still carried guns? Didn't he know they could use them? Hell! Where did he come from—him and his whining accent! Even as the lug made a slow, stupid reach for his coat pocket, Frank Woodson pulled his .38 on a .45 frame and let

him have two, one in the arm to slow the draw, the other between the eyes to slow all of him . . . permanently.

Then he swung the gun around to cover the rest of them.

He and Moultrie looked at each other for a long time. Finally, Woodson nodded at the little girl who was staring at the fallen foreigner and said, "The Eisenberg kid, hey?"

"Yeah. I'd say there was twenty-five grand on the line if you sort of shut up, Frank."

Frank Woodson laughed a little. "That was American style shooting, Larry. You know, faster on the draw . . . all even, but faster."

Big tough Moultrie, standing there with his hands up, looking as meek as you please, didn't say nothing at all, but Frank Woodson, watching his eyes, remembered how Moultrie used to look when he thought *he* had everything under control. So Frank turned—negligently, you might say—and caught the driver of the Cad square in the belly with two from the .38.

He grinned tightly at Moultrie. "When in the world will these guys learn how to use guns? Imagine, trying to unload a Tommy gun against a guy with his .38 out."

Moultrie looked just a little nervous. "You can't shoot everybody, Frank."

"Don't aim to try. Think I'll take the little girl into Phoenix. As for you and your lady friend, Larry—mmmn, gonna be tough walking the desert at night."

"We won't have to walk," Moultrie said easily.

He sounded very confident . . . then Frank Woodson got it. There were more to come. Sure, why not? One, maybe two follow-up cars . . . this was too big a job for just Larry and the woman who'd stood there, silent, a queer look in her eyes, scared, yet not-scared, not bothered at all by the two dopes on the floor.

So Frank Woodson had wrecked the Cad, jerked the little girl into his Merc—oh yes, he'd taken guns off Larry and a little bitty automatic out of the woman's purse—and Larry had said, mournfully, "There's only one highway to Phoenix, you know."

But the little girl . . . she was funny. She thought he was just another gangster and yet she hadn't been a bit worried when she had to change cars.

He was edging into curves now, not as sharp as they would be a little further on, but still they weren't bends he could take at ninety. He cut down. The light in the mirror grew brighter. A Merc was lighter than a Cad and a Cad could fight the turns better . . . had a bigger, heavier center of gravity. By

God, he could beat it on a straightaway, though . . . they were lovely cars to look at but, hell, they were just like the Arabian horses his old man used to talk about. "Flashy as all hell, son, I mind—but they needed water. Started out in the morning, took a big lead, but where were they at the end of the day?"

Things never changed, Frank thought.

"You have been awfully quiet," the girl said suddenly. "Those other people talked quite a lot. I thought Mr. Moultrie was very charming."

"Oh he is. A real nice guy—for a kidnaper. Hey, what's your name?"

"Annette, hey? That's a right pretty name. Well, I'll tell you, Annette. 'Fore this night's over, I reckon I'm gonna kill Mr. Moultrie."

"In Phoenix?"

"We're not gonna make Phoenix. Not enough gas. So your nice Mr. Moultrie and me will take a few shots at each somewheres along here. And that doesn't bother me a bit . . . even though I once thought Larry was a pal of mine."

The girl turned in the seat and, for the first time since she had walked into the barbecue, looked directly at him.

"I hope he wins," she said calmly.

Woodson almost let go the steering wheel. "Hey!" he gasped. "Don't you want to get back to your daddie?"

"Why should I?"

He cut the Merc around what was almost a hairpin turn. Ahead of him, almost at the top of the short grade, he saw the dim, unlit sign of a motel. That would be Jed Gordon's place, he recollected, and he sighed with vast relief. No time to gas up, not a chance to reach Phoenix . . . but Jed had a phone.

He touched the .38 in his shoulder-holster—fully reloaded, of course—he'd hold 'em off, by God!

He slowed, swung the car into the pebbled driveway. For a moment, he thought of hiding the car behind the cabins in back and taking a chance that his pursuers would pass up a search. But it was too big a risk. He pulled up alongside the log building that served as office, general store and home for Gordon and sounded his horn. The cabins looked empty . . . not much business this time of the year . . . and this wasn't the main highway to Phoenix.

He turned to the kid.

"Look, baby," he said, "I want you to know I understand you. You never had a good time in your life. All this has been excitement to you and, I reckon, fun. I understand that. You been neglected. You like Larry Moultrie. Maybe you even like that gal that said she was your aunt."

She giggled and with childish inconsistency said, "I even like you."

"But I thought you want Moultrie to lick me."

"Of course I do. Because I like him better."

"Aah," he snorted, "it's all comic book stuff to you! And it ain't that at all, Annie, it's—"

"No person has ever called me Annie before."

"D'you mind?"

"No. I think it's rather cute."

"Your dad shoulda had a pet name for you . . . like little guy . . . or something. Too bad."

Jed Gordon came out from the rear of the building, a flashlight in one hand and revolver in the other. "You want gas, get by the pump," he growled with sleepy surliness, "or what—uh, it's you, Frank!"

Woodson got out of the car and told him.

Gordon, wide awake now, unlocked the front door and they went inside.

"Don't turn on no lights," Woodson warned.

"Won't. You phone, or me?"

"You do it. Just tell the operator to notify MacGregor and the state cops. Can I take a rifle out of stock?"

"Help yourself," Gordon said as he cranked the wall phone. "Cartridges there too, in that opened crate. Get a gun down for me." He spoke hurriedly into the phone.

"That's a queer phone," Annette Eisenberg remarked.

"Country type," Woodson said, as he loaded two rifles. "What we call a party line. Works as well as any, I guess."

Jed Gordon hung up the receiver and said, "That's settled. Emma Marlowe's on duty and she's a smart girl. Be plenty of law up here right soon, Frank. Meantime," he scratched his balding head, "what d'you reckon's best to do?"

"You better keep outa this. Maybe you could take the kid into the timber while I—"

"Don't be foolish, boy. Wouldn't be five minutes 'fore we'd fall into a canyon an' break our necks. Unless the little lady can see in the dark." He winked at her.

Annette said gravely, "I can't see in the dark. That is, not very well."

In the dim light of the flashlight Woodson could see that Gordon looked a little puzzled so he said, "Kind of a serious kid. But never mind that—we gotta get organized. I can hear their car coming up the grade. The store, here, is a bad place—too many windows."

"Yeah. Tell you what—let's take the two forward cabins—one of us on each side of the driveway. That way we'll get 'em in a crossfire."

"Sounds good. Come on, Annie."

"Wait a minute," Gordon went to a rack of keys standing at one end of the counter. "They're locked . . . God knows why." He gave Frank Woodson a key and the three hurried out of the store.

They heard a car coming and ducked behind the gas pumps. The car swooshed past, then they heard its brakes squeal as it stopped fifty yards farther along the road.

"Saw my Merc," Woodson said casually. "Let's get goin'."

"Take it easy, now." Gordon chuckled. "An' don't waste any of that ammunition, the county ain't paid for it yet."

The log cabin smelled as do all rooms that have been shut up for a long time. Frank Woodson locked the door behind him, saw a heavy wooden chair, pulled it over to block the door. Then he took a quick, careful look around. Fair-sized living-and-bedroom, with a window facing the drive; door opening into a kitchen on his right; alongside that, a bathroom. The kitchen was ell-shaped, and most of it would be out of any line of fire.

Another car was coming up the grade and the first one, returning, sounded several long blasts on its horn.

Woodson went over to the living-room window and quietly raised it.

"Don't want any more busted glass than we can help," he remarked. Then he turned to the girl, standing quietly in the center of the room, and said, "Annie, you go into the kitchen and lay down on the floor, around that corner. Take a blanket from the bed if you're cold. But you stay flat on the floor, now, there'll be bullets flyin' all over the place an' I want you to keep outa their way."

"I'm afraid I shall have to go to the bathroom, first."

He laughed briefly, because it was the first normal, kid-like thing he had ever heard her say.

"All right, but hurry up."

He heard the toilet flush as the two big cars stopped directly in front of the motel. Woodson kneeled by the window, cradling the rifle in one arm. It was a .30-.30, a good gun with a fast, smooth action. He arranged several opened boxes of cartridges on the floor beside him. The .38 felt awkward in his shoulder holster, so he placed it, too, on the floor.

The enemy cars, confident, hadn't turned off their lights so he could see as well as hear clearly enough.

"Well," he said aloud, "I'm as ready as I'll ever be." He looked over his shoulder at the kitchen and could not see the girl. "You all set, Annie," he whispered.

"Yes," she whispered back.

"Just stay there," he ordered.

Someone outside flashed a spotlight on his Merc and then a heavy voice said, "The car. Suppose he ran out of gas?"

That voice had no accent. Woodson wondered how many honest-to-god Americans were in on the deal.

There was a muttered conference, then Moultrie's voice came clearly. "Let's try it my way, first." Then he called out, "Frank! Frank Woodson! Come on, boy, I know you're holed up here someplace! Now look, Frank—you give us the kid and I swear to you we won't bother you. Or Jed Gordon either, if he's with you. Otherwise, we'll blow all three of you to hell! I mean it, Frank! You know we've got tommy guns!"

There was a silence, broken only by the night noises of the mountains.

"Okay," Moultrie said finally, "give it to them!"

From both cars came the harsh clatter of machine guns. The front of the store got it first and the windows were shattered and Woodson could hear the clatter of canned goods falling from the shelves. One of the gas pumps exploded, fell over on its side, then burned with a dull glare. Watching the flashes, Woodson saw the guns swing toward the cabin and spread himself flat against the wall. He heard the thunk of bullets hitting the logs of his own cabin, then a buzz as a few rounds came through the window. One of these went through the open bathroom door and splintered the mirror of the medicine chest. He looked to the kitchen. The girl had not moved.

The noise of the machine guns came to a ragged stop.

"Nobody here," said someone.

"Bound to be," growled Moultrie.

"Maybe they took to the woods."

"Not without a light, I tell you! Only thing to do now is to get out and take it, cabin by cabin."

From the angry muttering that burst out Woodson gathered that the rest of them didn't cotton to that idea at all. He grinned. Finally, someone said, "I agree with Larry. We can't stay here all night."

Woodson watched as some of them, probably not all, opened the car doors and cautiously moved out. They walked slowly, clearly outlined in the glare of headlights. As they moved across the driveway, they spread out a little and Woodson counted eight before they came under the sights of his deer rifle.

"Okay, bums," he whispered. "Here's where you get it, bums."

It sounded as if he and Gordon fired their first shots together. But after that, Woodson paid no particular heed to the other cabin, just being vaguely

aware that regular flashes came from its window. Two of the kidnapers fell at the first volley. Woodson saw a third man swing around toward his cabin and raise a submachine gun. Woodson methodically dropped him, saw him try to rise and dropped him again, permanently. Shots roared through and around his window and he saw three men running toward the cars.

"Put out all of them damn lights!"

The lights went out, Woodson shot at the three who were still running, blinded a little by the sudden cessation of light. But his target fell, then raised himself on one arm and emptied an automatic in the general direction of Frank Woodson's window. Jed Gordon fired and the man on the ground sank very slowly back and his gun fell out of his hand.

Steady firing came from both cars but now it seemed, from the rythmn, as if there were only one tommy gun active. Woodson counted six men lying on the driveway. He hunched himself forward to get a better look at the enemy and was startled by a sudden pain in his chest. He had been hit close to his left shoulder. Other than the sharply persistent pain, Woodson felt no particular weakness. He probed for the hole, found it, felt a slow ooze of blood around his fingertips.

Not much bleeding, he thought . . . okay, he'd just have to stand it . . . couldn't bandage it himself. . . .

He squinted out at the cars, now two blobs of blackness darker than the night, but two blobs that seemed to ring like firecrackers, exploding all over the place. His window was now a direct target and he had to keep back against the wall, shooting only often enough to show them he was still there. There was no point, now, in shooting oftener for the cars, likely bulletproof, gave plenty of cover. All he and Jed could do, granting that Jed was still alive, was to keep the kidnapers pinned down until help came.

"Mr. Woodson," Annette called during a lull, "are—are you all right?"

"Sure, Annie. Right as rain. Don't you get scared, now."

"But I *am* scared . . ."

"Sure you are, honey. So am I."

"You are!"

"Anyone's scared when the bullets start comin' at 'em, Annie. Then it's for real—ain't the movies, or the comic books, is it?"

"No . . . I never realized . . ."

"Not your fault, honey. Lotsa things all of us never realize—until it's too late. But, Annie, it ain't too late for you—"

The sound of a starter grinding into action cut him off. He

peered out and saw that one car was moving forward, out of his own line of fire; the other was backing up, getting out of Gordon's.

"Gettin' smart, damn them!" Woodson muttered.

Then a rattle of shots roared out of Gordon's window and he grinned. We still got 'em, he thought happily, and fired at the car he could see.

He saw a man run out from behind it, toward the trees in back of Gordon's cabin, took careful aim, fired, saw the runner fall. Then he heard the crash of glass somewhere behind him and his cabin exploded into darkness.

After a while, it seemed that he could see again but now, another part of his body hurt like the devil. While he was wondering about this, he heard the girl's voice, very indistinctly, say, "But what about Mr. Woodson?"

And Larry Moultrie, of all people, what was Larry doing *in* the cabin, replied, "Frank's dead, girl. I shot him from the kitchen window. You come with me, now."

Woodson reached out a weak hand, clumsy fingers slipped in something wet—he was bleeding a lot now—found the butt of his .38, clasped it. Then he lifted himself to a sitting position with an effort that almost made him vomit.

Larry Moultrie stood in the fore part of the kitchen, both hands outstretched to the girl.

Both hands were empty.

"Come on," Moultrie said again, "we've got to hurry. I don't want to hurt you, kid, but I'm not going to fool around."

"I—I don't want to go." The precise little voice had tears in it.

"She's not going," Woodson said calmly. "Turn around, Larry."

Moultrie whirled, darted a hand to his belt, saw the .38 and slowly raised his hands.

"I should have made sure," he grinned. "I forgot how tough you were, Frank."

"Oh, Mr. Woodson!" the girl cried. "He said you were . . . dead!"

"Yeah." Woodson grunted a little for it was difficult for him to talk and breathe at the same time. "Like he says, he should have made sure. So, I guess I win, Annie."

"I'm glad!"

"You are, honey? Okay, Moultrie, take a step back, into this room here. I'm gonna kill you, Larry boy, an' I don't want you falling on the kid."

"Hey, take it easy, Frank. I got my hands up—I'm your prisoner!"

"You ain't nobody's prisoner. You're just a dirty, lousy child-stealer. Not gonna discuss you being a traitor—bums like you

don't know loyalty. But a guy who'd steal another man's child—"

"Frank! For God's sake, man! I've surrendered! Don't kill me, boy—don't shoot me down in cold blood! You can't, you can't . . ."

Scattered shots sounded outside, then far below they heard the wail of a siren.

Frank Woodson nodded. The law would make it in time . . . Professor Eisenberg would get his little girl back. . . .

"Look, Annie," he said, "this ain't nice, but I gotta do it, honey—so you'll know for sure some of those things you didn't know before. Look at him, Annie. That's the Mister Moultrie you thought was kinda exciting. He's a coward, Annie. Only way he could get past me was to shoot me in the back. Now, listen to him beg for his life—see him cry—you gotta know, Annie—gotta know when a man is a man an' when he ain't. Your father's a man, a great man. But this Larry Moultrie . . . he never *was* a man."

He pulled the trigger.

Outside the sirens grew louder and one of the cars started up, then the other, but a siren sounded now from *up* the mountain and Frank Woodson was content. He started to slump back, tried to straighten, could not, then felt the wall of the cabin against his shoulder blades. He couldn't stop his fingers and the .38 fell to the floor with a quiet clank.

He heard a soft noise in front of him and lifted his head. The girl stood there.

"Mr. Woodson," she whispered, "are—are you going to die?"

"Reckon so, Annie . . ."

There was another soft noise and he felt, rather than saw, her sit down beside him. He put out his arm, feebly, and she huddled inside of it, holding its dead weight on her thin shoulders. A long way off he heard Jed Gordon's voice, calling his name.

"I'm awfully sorry," she whispered. "I—I like you ever so much."

"Do you, honey?"

"It's very sudden—and awfully hard for me to understand—but I like you more than I've ever liked anyone in my whole life."

"That's real nice, Annie. You were a brave girl, tonight . . . now look, honey, want you to promise me one thing. You . . . you tell your dad. . . ."

She waited, then said anxiously, "Yes—tell my dad?"

"You tell your dad I said he was to make you like him as much as you like me. Tell him I said that's more important than . . . than atoms . . . you tell him, now. . . ."

"I'll tell him," Annette Eisenberg said, and began to cry.

webster and the wienerwalz

by . . Veronica Parker Johns

WEBSTER FLAGG, itinerant domestic who could afford to be choosy about his employers, looked forward to this evening's assignment with high relish. The lucky persons who currently shared the part-time benefits of his services were a sorrily unglamorous lot for one whose spangled career had included appearances in opera and the theater, who had hobnobbed with the grease-painted great both as associate and servant. In delightful contrast the host of tonight's dinner party was a famous producer of Viennese light opera, visiting this country, as an added fillip, incognito.

Webster's regular clients, in excesses of generosity, sometimes farmed him out to deserving friends, a magnificent gesture they never lived to regret since he was the soul of loyalty with strong convictions against any attempts at Webster-snatching. Mr. Bob (Friday) Winthrop, who had inherited Webster from his parents, was doing the handsome tonight in the interests of his fiancée, Charlotte Mitchell, whose own mother

Yes. It was an excellent likeness he concurred—thereby sealing his doom.

Webster Flagg, one-time Shakespearean actor, itinerant super-domestic and occasional detective, is a newcomer to these pages—but not to the field. The distinguished Mr. Flagg, so much a personification of the spirit of the Old South, can be deadly—politely, of course—when he meets irregular practises.

and daddy were visiting New York from the mill town they practically owned some place in the South. Tonight they were dining with Mr. von Hoffman, the aforesaid impresario. For a reason which Webster had not yet been able to determine—although he knew Miss Mitchell was studying singing and figured there must be a connection there—she was all-fired eager that the evening be a big success.

Daddy Mitchell congenitally mistrusted foreigners and had a digestion rebellious toward all alien cuisines; nothing, it had been decided, would so predispose him to like a Viennese as that man's employment of an American cook.

Webster, whose impersonation of the old Southern family retainer was letter perfect, was obviously a must for the occasion.

A bellboy let him into the suite in the East Side apartment hotel. He was pleased to note that the opulently furnished room in one respect resembled his own somewhat humbler abode, crammed as it was with photographs of a decidedly theatrical bent. He supposed that most of von Hoffman's friends were Europeans of whom he might never have heard, yet looked forward to perusing the autographs in the hope of finding a few who had also gained fame on this continent.

Many people failed to understand Webster's zest for his present occupation, which they dismissed as menial, even degrading. He couldn't see it that way. On the contrary, he was aware of being his own boss, able to quit or stay at whim, with far more room to move around in than he would have if he spent his life in casting offices awaiting the ideal role for an aging colored actor.

Besides flexibility the work offered a chance intimately to know people, a species of which on the whole he approved, about which he maintained a perpetually keen curiosity. The peculiar circumstances of today particularly pleased him. The minute he entered this place he was in the employ of a man he had never seen, an unknown quantity. You could tell a lot about a person by the place he lived in, just as you probably could judge a pig by his pen if you had the proper criteria. Webster was an expert at knowing what to look for, the significant details of surroundings which were so much a part of personality.

The entering of each new apartment began a quiz game, begged the question, "What sort of woman would she be if she keeps a messy kitchen?" Or, in this specific instance, what

sort of man would have a Bechstein grand upon which rested the score of "The Merry Widow" and several signed portraits of tenors and primadonnas? He was sure he could precisely have pinpointed von Hoffman's profession, and was almost sorry he had been told instead of allowed to guess.

In the kitchen he found a note which led off with his name and was signed by von Hoffman's. He picked it up, admiring the firm, purposeful stroke of the penmanship.

Years before, in a lean summer when the Shakespearean troupe with which he was touring was stranded in Milwaukee, he had worked his way back east with a carnival outfit. One of his duties had been to serve as Zouave doorman—or, to be exact, tent flap man—for a handwriting expert, in the course of which apprenticeship he had evolved a generally accurate graphology system of his own. A man who wrote like this knew what he was about, was a person of strong will and determination it would be a pleasure to work for because you would always know just what he wanted you to do.

The content of the note was less gratifying, being the menu Miss Mitchell had chosen and for which she had already bought the necessaries. The *Things Daddy Liked* were very run of the mill, chicken and trimmings, a sweet potato pie, whereas Webster, who was a ham and reveled in it, would have preferred to wow Mr. von H. with a Magyar specialty, if possible serving it forth on a flaming sword. Moreover, he had a recipe for a champagne cup guaranteed to turn the brown Danube blue again, but it seemed Daddy drank only juleps.

He was well into the uninspiring preparations when von Hoffman himself showed up in the rather disappointing flesh. The handwriting, especially the boldly crossed T's, had indicated a larger, more imposing figure beside which Mr. von Hoffman's seemed wispy. He wore a dark suit, a white ascot, a waxed moustache and a monocle on a narrow black ribbon. His English was so execrable that Webster had difficulty in understanding a word he said but finally made out that the host-to-be planned a long soak in a hot tub before his guests arrived and would like not to be disturbed for at least half an hour.

It was an order Webster was presently forced to disobey when a bellboy turned up with a florist's box. Since the flowers were to be charged to von Hoffman's account, the boy said with a shrug intimating that record was not unblemished, the management had requested Mr. von

Hoffman's signature upon the receipt. Automatically protesting this implied criticism of a man for whom he worked, Webster nevertheless went to the bathroom door and knocked.

Von Hoffman rose dripping from the tub, opened the door a crack, peeped out. After the errand had been explained to him he emerged completely, wrapped in a bath towel, resembling a mouse in a toga. He took his monocle from the dresser, adjusted it. Webster lent him his fountain pen, and the man signed the slip.

Webster, watching him do it, felt the nudge of curiosity, the spurt of interest in the evening ahead, because the letters which the pen was tracing were not those of the note in the kitchen. These were small, painstakingly made as if the writer wrote rarely, totally without character, as though he were not precisely sure who he was.

Webster's confidence in himself as a graphologist was fully restored. The man he would have conjured up from this sample of handwriting was the living spit of Mr. von Hoffman.

As he cracked the ice for the juleps then packed it into tall glasses atop a muddled sugar lump and a crushed green leaf he pondered the puzzle of his employer's split personality. When a logical explanation at last presented itself he did not welcome it, taking as it did the fun out of things: Mr. von Hoffman talked English like he was walking on eggs; perhaps writing it was even more of a chore, of which some kind benefactor had relieved him in the case of the note about the menu.

Von Hoffman did not dock himself for the time spent outside the tub but enjoyed the full half hour and a fraction. When he reappeared in the kitchen he was again wearing the apparel in which he had arrived home. This struck Webster as slightly odd. Most people who made such a ceremony of ablutions before a dinner party didn't climb directly back into the clothes they'd been wearing all day, especially people of apparent affluence. He did not have time to give the matter much thought, however, before there was a knock on the door which he opened to admit Mr. Bob and his Charlotte.

Miss Mitchell was a mighty pretty girl, blonde, fulsome, with a real Southern magnolia complexion. Mr. Bob looked very handsome in his tuxedo, in fact he always looked handsome when his lady was in town. When she was away, studying singing in this or that continental capital, he grew thin and peaked due to the lack of home cooking.

Throughout the years of this somewhat lopsided romance Webster had kept pretty close tabs on Miss Mitchell's itinerary from the book matches he found in Mr. Bob's apartment. When she was in Paris there'd been an outbreak of Petit So-and-sos and Chez Whozis's. The Pizzerias piled up when she went to Rome. Most recently the Viennese bars and restaurants got Mr. Bob's trade as he strove to maintain vicarious and wholly unsatisfactory contact with his beloved while she roamed.

As Bob tenderly shucked off Charlotte's mink, looking capable of flaying dragons if that would keep her in his vicinity, there came another knock upon the door. The parent Mitchells stood on the threshold looking touristy and anxious. Charlotte swept her mother into her arms while her father stiffly shook hands with his prospective, although obviously not pined for son-in-law.

Daddy Mitchell was a small man but not of von Hoffman's mold, cast more in the Napoleonic pattern. He pranced over to his host, who had just entered the room, and accosted him jovially:

"You must be the screech teacher my daughter thought of so highly she had to smuggle you into the country. Well, I backed up your request for a guest visa, so you behave."

"Daddy!" Miss Mitchell had been stymied by horror from correcting the error until this moment. "Mr. *Schwantzer* is my voice coach. This is Herr von Hoffman, the world's foremost producer of operetta."

"Sorry," Mr. Mitchell said, not looking it. "Those foreign names all sound alike to me."

Miss Mitchell introduced her mother to von Hoffman then presented Bob. "A pleasure, sir," the young man said with warmth as he strode across the room.

He was a bit near sighted. It wasn't until he got within handshaking distance that he paused and peered closely.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" he asked.

"I'm a type," von Hoffman replied modestly. "Many of my countrymen look all the same."

Webster, taking it all in, vouchsafed that this was the truth. He had just remembered Leo Ditrichstein, the Great Lover of the theater who had set the pre-1920 maidens to swooning long before there was a Sinatra. Leo came from von Hoffman's neck of the woods, he believed, and had once appeared on a benefit program with Webster. He wouldn't be surprised to find a picture of him in this gallery. He'd look around soon as he could; it would be a nice gambit with which to start reminiscences

about the old days in show business. Webster liked nothing better than chewing the rag about the stage.

Bob was enthusiastically pumping Leo's double's hand. "Of course I couldn't possibly have seen you before," he remarked. "Charlotte told me you arrived in this country only last week. But I do hope to see a lot of you from now on, and I wish the greatest success to your project."

As he went to fetch the juleps Webster laid a small side bet that the project in question had something to do with making Miss Charlotte stay put for a while in N.Y.C.

It was discussed quite openly at dinner, which was served shortly after the arrival of the last expected guest who proved to be Mr. Schwantzer, Charlotte's current teacher. Webster had been more than glad to see him since his robust appearance and grand manner made it seem likely that he had already had correspondence with him, so to speak; Schwantzer, without stepping out of character, would write in the grandiose script of the note.

He had the easy diction with spoken English that von Hoffman lacked. It wasn't hard to see how he had talked Miss Mitchell into bringing him home with her, out of the city of vanquished waltzes into the land of golden opportunity. He was a positive spellbinder as he outlined his hopes for the future.

"When I heard that Herr von Hoffman was touring America incognito and had just reached New York," he said, "it seemed, how shall I say it, a miracle. Through friends from my homeland I discovered where he was stopping. I imposed upon a very slight acquaintance," he paused to smile deferentially at the impresario, "and requested an audience. *Gott sei dank,* it was granted."

What had then transpired engaged Webster's interest. Von Hoffman had consented to dabble in television which, in Schwantzer's evident opinion and with due allowance for time and mortality was roughly equivalent to getting the late Max Reinhardt to stage a couple of commercials.

"We would do one hour condensations of the great operettas on film," Schwantzer expounded. "Everything first class, the director, naturally, the orchestra, the singers, the costumes. And the star, that so beautiful young American lady, Miss Charlotte Mitchell."

Webster was enchanted by the plan and immediately foresaw its commercial potential assured by the magic name of von Hoffman. So completely was he sold on the idea that he began

mentally to riffle through the operettas he knew in search of a role for himself.

Daddy Mitchell, on the other hand, was a hard nut to crack. "How much would it cost?" he asked succinctly.

"Daddy, please!" Charlotte deplored the irreverence.

"If our little girl has her heart set on it," Mrs. Mitchell began, then her mouth became a thin line as Daddy's fist crashed upon the table.

"I'm not saying I won't do it," he roared. "Will you women kindly shut up? I'm not stingy with my daughter. I've given her every penny she's asked for for singing lessons. But I happen to be a business man and I'm simply asking how much the deal would cost. Isn't that a fair question?"

"Of course," Mr. Schwantzer said evenly. He and von Hoffman stared at each other momentarily as if they were drawing straws to see who would handle the answer which was clearly a hot potato.

"Well," von Hoffman shrugged, "it is not easy to say in American money."

"I wasn't asking in kopecks," said the irascible Mr. Mitchell. Tactfully, his wife reminded him of his blood pressure. His daughter began to weep.

This teary calamity Bob Winthrop could not bear. Patting the hand on which his engagement ring sparkled he cleared his throat and butted in: "Perhaps I can throw some light on that. I've a friend in an advertising agency who tells me a good film costs somewhere in the neighborhood of fifty thousand dollars, a mighty expensive neighborhood as the jokesters say. Furthermore, he said that the way unexpected costs can mount would curl your hair."

Charlotte stopped crying long enough to glare at him and to withdraw her hand as though his were a hot pot handle, aptly pantomiming the fact that he was hindering, not helping. Bob bit his lip and tried another tack:

"Maybe you could skimp a little. And you make one only, to show around to sponsors. They call it a pilot film."

Von Hoffman, who had grown a little tipsy with his julep, was now pretty far gone in wine. He reared himself up to his full five feet, one and a half inches.

"Von Hoffman does not skimp," he declaimed indistinctly. "He does not make a pilot film like some fellow in a sailor suit. He makes five films, or he don't make none."

"A quarter of a million dollars!" Daddy was quick with figures. "I just haven't got it to throw around," he fumed.

Schwantzer was on his feet, again assuming command.

"You are looking at this in the wrong light, Mr. Mitchell," he argued. "We are not begging you to give us money. We are giving you an opportunity, because you are Charlotte's father, to invest in a business proposition which will easily return five times what it costs.

"Herr von Hoffman and I are artists, not merchants. Permit me to call in a third person, a friend of mine who has what they call a television packaging agency. He will be able to explain this to you in terms of dollars and cents."

He went into the bedroom where the telephone was. The others drifted away from the table which had been set up at one end of the living room. They had barely dented the sweet potato pie, and for the first time Webster was glad that he had not swerved from Miss Mitchell's instructions to the extent of baking a very tricky Viennese torte that was in his repertory.

Mr. Schwantzer returned presently with fully regained poise and the information that his friend would be there in practically no time.

"Meanwhile," he said, rubbing his hands and beaming genially, "shall we not have a charming recital of song with our coffee?" He went to the concert grand, opened it, ran a few arpeggios. "Come my nightingale," he urged. Charlotte, obviously a girl who did not have to be asked twice, blew her nose and leapt to her feet; in a trice she was the Merry Widow waltzing with Prince Danilo.

She wasn't the worst singer Webster had ever heard, but at the minute he could not think of a more likely candidate for that title. He was reminded that this was only one man's opinion when he saw Mrs. Mitchell's rapt expression, the doting gleam in Mr. Bob's eye, the way Daddy snuggled back into his chair as music soothed the savage breast. Mr. von Hoffman smiled dreamily, keeping time with his hands as though he conducted an invisible orchestra like the kind they have in the movies. At the piano Charlotte's mentor looked positively smug.

Webster knew himself to be an awful fusspot where singing was concerned, having had enough professional training and experience to be acutely aware of errors which might get by the general public. Disallowing this, however, there was no denying the fact that Miss Mitchell had a bad tremolo and a tendency to flat. Her voice was so small, moreover, that in deference to its minuteness he stopped clearing the table and went into the kitchen to do the dishes that were already there.

Unfortunately, in there he could still hear her.

He heard the next arrival before he saw him, since the television packager possessed a voice that did not require a microphone. He seemed to be delivering a spiel, routing Mr. Mitchell's arguments before giving that gentleman a chance to articulate them. The word "sponsor" recurred like a nervous tic.

Bob Winthrop came into the kitchen to get a highball for the newcomer. He looked troubled.

"I guess I'll have one myself, too," he weakened. "You know, Webster, I've either got a complex or I need eyeglasses because the strangest thing has happened to me twice this evening. Both people I met here looked familiar. Von Hoffman I couldn't possibly have seen before. And this new guy, Clarence Dell, swears he's never met me."

"He could be wrong," Webster pointed out. "You know lots of folks in advertising and radio."

"Yes, but I can't seem to place him with that crowd. Do you think I should have my eyes examined?"

"No," Webster said, thinking, *not your eyes but your ears,* but, being friends as they were, having known the boy since he was thirteen, he could say most things to him but not that.

To tell the truth, he'd worked himself up into quite a stew over Miss Charlotte's vocal powers, or rather lack of them, during the last few minutes. Always when he got off by himself, doing work which required no greater concentration than did dishwashing, his mind started racing, running thoughts to ground as a hound dog does a rabbit. He was real upset now, although he kept telling himself the matter did not actually concern him.

He was certain that von Hoffman was a phoney, a breed which he particularly detested, probably because he was himself so often forced to be a phoney in reverse. A man of considerable experience with specialized knowledge in several categories, he frequently was obliged deferentially to murmur, "Is that a fact, sir?" when presented with an item which was scarcely news to him. Constrained to pretend that he was less than he was, he resented people who pretended to exceed themselves.

This von Hoffman was obviously doing. Webster had guessed it not only because the man was so mousily tentative that it seemed incredible he could dominate a solo harmonica player let alone a full orchestra, a chorus, and principals. Even his apparent ownership of only one suit could not be considered incriminating but might be laid to some quirk of tem-

perament. The main bit of evidence Webster had against him was the conviction that no man who loved music enough to have made a good living and a reputation out of it could listen to Charlotte's Merry Widow without wincing. That he couldn't tell Mr. Bob, who should by rights be put on guard against whatever skullduggery was afoot, so he held his tongue and bided his time as the boy walked back to the living room with the highball glasses.

In a few minutes he followed, to clear off the table and finish up his work for the night. He set about it quietly, but immediately perceived there was no danger of disturbing the group at the far end of the room. Mr. Clarence Dell was indeed a charm boy, a super salesman. He had modulated his stentorian voice to a coo as he praised Mr. Mitchell's acumen and ventured to guess that should such an astute business man not be financially able to underwrite the entire project himself he would not be at a loss for co-investors. Daddy Mitchell was canny, but no match for this city slicker. He was already fingering his check book.

Webster removed the last dishes, crumbed the drop leaf table and took out the center leaf with which it had been extended, moved it back against the wall where it formerly stood. From a dresser drawer he took the photographs he had hastily thrown there when time had pressed before dinner. Now, since the others in the room seemed not to be aware of his presence, he put them back upon the table where they belonged in a more leisurely fashion, studying each in turn.

He'd been right in guessing that most of them were foreigners or whom he had never heard. That was true of the first seven, but the eighth picture stopped him in his tracks. Its subject was a picquant brunette with a dazzling smile and a headdress of white osprey. It was inscribed, "To darling 'Putzi' von Hoffman," and the signature made him blink.

There was an unwritten law in the profession he now pursued: you could interrupt any conversation, however important, with a request for your wages when it was time to go home. A bit prematurely, since the dessert dishes were not yet washed, he availed himself of this loophole, beckoning Mr. von Hoffman to his side.

"You owe me six-fifty," he whispered, then flourished the photograph. "I was a great admirer of hers," he said. "You knew her?"

"Very well," the other boasted.

"And her sister, too?"

"Oh, yes indeed."

"This is an excellent likeness, isn't it?"

"The best I've seen," Mr. von Hoffman concurred, thereby sealing his doom.

Webster dropped the picture and marched straight over to Bob Winthrop, wrested the half-filled highball glass from his hand, murmured, "I'll just freshen that up for you, sir," and deliberately dribbled the contents on Bob's white shirt front. "So clumsy of me," he apologized, winking furiously. "You just please to step into the kitchen and I'll sop you up."

There was a tableau around the desk at this moment. Daddy had taken out his fountain pen and was tapping his teeth with it.

Everyone seemed to be holding his or her breath, except Miss Charlotte who was breathing very deeply. Nobody paid any attention to Bob and Webster as they left the room.

Webster closed the kitchen door.

"What's wrong?" Bob asked. "I haven't seen you with the wind up so high since Joe Diver bloodied my nose on my fourteenth birthday."

"There, you see," he marked the words. "Webster knows what's good for you. I'd always told you not to go trusting that no-account Joe. Now I must tell you not to trust these here gentlemen. They're impostors, Mr. Bob. They're out to fleece your Miss Charlotte's daddy."

Bob looked aghast. "You're nuts," he said, being a character privileged enough to take such liberties. "I can't believe it."

"You'd better believe it, and fast. I'm not even going to take time to tell you how I know, but I know that von Hoffman is not what he says he is. If Daddy Mitchell signs any checks and they latch onto them, even if he stops payment they may blackmail him. That Daddy Mitchell is a vain man. He might pay to keep himself from looking hoodwinkable."

Bob turned away, but not before a flicker in his eye had betrayed the shakiness of his certainty.

"You're way off base, Pops," he mumbled. "Von Hoffman is everything he says he is. I looked him up in 'Who's Who.' He's the greatest. The TV show will go over big and Charlotte—"

Webster laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Sonny," he interrupted, "you don't need a bunch of con men to keep your sweetie in New York. You can do it your own self. If you march straight in there and prevent Daddy Mitchell from making a fool of *him*self you'll be the man of his year. He'll be so hungry to have you for a son-in-law he won't let her go

traipsing off like she has been doing."

Bob's eyes narrowed speculatively. "Keep talking," he said. "I'm listening."

Webster complied: "I hate to disarrange your delusions. True, there's a big-time operetta man named von Hoffman, but that doesn't signify he's the gentleman here tonight. People are inclined to believe the things they want to believe, so it's natural you wouldn't ask him to prove he's who he says."

Bob's arm shot out, grasping Webster's above the elbow so hard that it hurt. "Bingo!" he shouted. "You convinced me who he isn't. Damned if I haven't just remembered who he is, and that other one, too, Ball-of-fire Dell. The mist's rolled away from my eyes. Or the film, if you'll pardon the pun. The fifty-thousand-dollar film that was never really there."

He dashed toward the door. "Winthrop rides again," he whooped over his shoulder. "Want to see me wrap them up? Come on, Webster."

The invitation was superfluous but even an Olympic runner could not have kept pace with Bob. By the time Webster reached the living room the aroused Mr. Winthrop stood in the center of it, pointing an accusing finger at the alleged von Hoffman.

"Are you, or have you ever been the relief zither player at the Wienerwald on Second Avenue?" he harassed the witness who was uncooperative to the extent of not being able to speak at all. Bob pivotted and addressed the so-called Clarence Dell, asking if he was not, in fact, the master of ceremonies at The Viennese Candlestick, adding, "Boy, have you got lousy gag-writers!" His international pub-crawling was paying off.

Mr. Schwantzer gulped for air. For a minute Webster thought he might be an honest dupe of the other two, although that didn't jibe with his handwriting—if that was his handwriting on the note—which indicated a man of authority, possibly the brains of the setup. Then Dell, who had seemed to be the one among the trio with the most brass, collapsed like a beginner's popover.

"I told you we couldn't get away with it," he snarled, springing at Schwantzer, and thereby upping the jig.

Daddy Mitchell held a cigarette lighter to the check, filled out and signed but fortunately still in his possession. Miss Charlotte was looking at Mr. Bob starrily as if he were cueing her into a rendition of "My Hero" from "The Chocolate Soldier." Then she scrambled into her mink while her mother inched into her Persian lamb

and the three honest men in the den of thieves grabbed their coats and hats.

As the five headed toward the bank of elevators Webster unregretfully kissed the wages due him good-bye, the evening's excitement seeming cheap at half the price. And he fervently hoped von Hoffman and the others would have a heck of a time scraping the sweet potato pie off the dessert plates.

Daddy Mitchell stopped at the registration desk on the way out to ask how long von Hoffman had been in residence and was told he had just moved in that afternoon.

"He may just move out," he warned. "I'd keep an eye on him."

The clerk's veneer of discretion cracked slightly. "Thank you, sir," he said. "We are already vigilant. The boy who showed him up mentioned that he got an awfully small tip from someone who had engaged the most expensive suite in the hotel. The suitcases were pretty shabby, too."

Webster had a hunch that however watchful they were they'd be stuck with an unpaid bill and would just have to be satisfied with some sheet music, a bushel of forged and already secondhand photographs and the wornout luggage which had probably contained nothing else. Von Hoffman had undoubtedly worn his entire wardrobe on his back.

"I don't think we'll say anything more about this," Daddy Mitchell muttered embarrassedly as they reached the sidewalk. "I mean I don't think we want to go to the police."

"Nothing to go to them with," Bob pointed out, "although I suppose an attempted swindle is a crime even if it fluffs. But all the publicity—Besides, I don't think they're really criminals. They're just three Viennese barflies who thought they had an easy thing within their reach and grabbed for it. Where'd you run afoul of Schwantzer, Charlotte?"

"In a bar," she supplied shamefacedly. "Between the acts at the opera in Vienna. He volunteered to give me a sample lesson, then said nicer things about my voice than I had ever heard."

She began to cry again. "I'll never be a singer," she wailed disconsolately. "I guess I might as well face it."

Bob took both her hands. "You might as well go home," he said tenderly. "Get a good night's sleep. I'll call you in the morning for lunch. We've got a lot to talk over."

They packed the three Mitchells into a cab then Bob, who lived nearby, walked to the subway with Webster.

"How did you guess."

"It wasn't exactly a guess," Webster replied with quiet modesty. "Things just sort of verged into territory I was familiar with and I knew the deal wasn't on the level.

"Maybe they were before your time, Mr. Bob, but I think you must have heard of the Dolly sisters, Rozika and Yansi their real names were. We called them Rosie and Jenny over here. Great team. We were in a show together at the old Century Theater.

"I've heard of them," Bob said. "Twins, weren't they?"

"Not quite exactly, especially as they grew older. There was a little shade of difference you could spot if you knew them well. Trouble was that whoever trumped up that chummy autograph on Mr. von Hoffman's picture of one of them chose himself the name of the wrong Dolly."

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calypsonian

by . . . Samuel Selvon

"If a man have money today . . .
He could commit murder
and get away free
And live in the Governor's
company . . ."

IT HAD a time when things was really brown in Trinidad, and he couldn't make a note nohow, no matter what he do, everywhere he turn, people telling him they ain't have work. It look like if work scarce like gold, and is six months now he ain't working.

He owe everybody. He have a dollar for Mavis, he have three shilling for Conks (he see good hell to get that three shilling off Conks) and he have twelve cents for Man Centipede. Besides that, he owe Chin parlour about five dollars, and the last time he went in for a sandwich and a sweet-drink, Chin tell him no more trusting until he pay off all he owe. Chin have his name in a copybook under the counter.

"Wait until the calypso season start up," he tell Chin, "and I go be reaping a harvest. You remember last year how much money I had?"

But though Chin remember last year, that still ain't make him soften up, and it reach a

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Trinidad-born Samuel Selvon, Guggenheim fellow, author of a number of novels about the West Indies, describes the making of a thief in this patois *story of a side of West Indian life not generally known to Americans. This is the beautiful island that the tourist posters describe—and life, very much devoid of glamour, when Carnival time is over. It is true that this is not a detective story—but this does describe the making of a thief. And who knows or can tell where he will be tomorrow . . . . ?*

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position where he hungry, clothes dirty, and he see nothing at all to come, and this time so, the calypso season about three four months off.

On top of all that, rain falling nearly every day, and the shoes he have on have big hole in them, like if they laughing, and the water getting up in the shoes and have his foot wet.

One day he get so damn disgusted he take off the shoes and walk barefoot all in Frederick Street and Charlotte Street, and people looking at him as if he mad, but he don't give a blast.

Was the rain what cause him to tief a pair of shoes from by a shoemaker shop in Park Street. Is the first time he ever tief, and it take him a long time to make up his mind. He stand up there on the pavement by this shoemaker shop, and he thinking things like "Oh God when I tell you I hungry," and all the shoes around the table, on the ground, some old and some new, some getting halfsole and some getting new heel.

It have a pair just like the one he have on.

The table cut up for so, as if the shoemaker blind and cutting the wood instead of the leather, and it have a broken calabash shell with some boil starch in it. The starch look like porridge; he so hungry he feel he could eat it.

Well, the shoemaker in the back of the shop, and it only have few people sheltering rain on the pavement. It look so easy for him to put down the old pair and take up another pair—this time so, he done have his eye fix on a pair that look like Tecnics, and his size too besides.

He remember how last year he was sitting pretty—two-tone Tecnic, gaberdeen suit, hot tie. Now that he catching his royal, everytime he only making comparison with last year, thinking in his mind how them was the good old days, and wondering if they go ever come back again.

And it look to him as if tiefing could be easy, because plenty time people does leave things alone and go away, like how now the shoemaker in the back of the shop, and all he have to do is take up a pair of shoes and walk off in cool blood.

Well, it don't take plenty to make a tief in Trinidad. All you have to do is have a fellar catching his royal,[1] and can't get a work noway, and bam! by the time he make two three rounds he bounce[2] something from somewhere, a orange from a tray, or he snatch a bread in a parlour, or something.

Like how he bounce the shoes.

So though he frighten like hell and part of him going like a pliers, he playing victor brave

[1]Be unemployed

[2]Steals

boy and whistling as he go down the road.

The only thing now is that he hungry.

Right there by Queen Street, in front of a chinee restaurant, he get a idea. Not a idea in truth; all he did thing was: in for a shilling, in for a pound. But when he think that, is as if he begin to realise that if he going to get stick for the shoes, he might as well start tiefing black is white.

It had a time he uses to tell the boys so. He uses to say: "It don't make no sense going to jail for tiefing twenty dollar, you might as well tief couple thousand."

So he open now to anything; all you need is a start, all you need is a crank up, and it come easy after that.

What you think he planning to do? He planning to walk in the chinee restaurant and sit down and eat a major meal, and then out off without paying. It look so easy, he wonder why he never think of it before.

The waitress come up while he looking at the menu. She stand up there with a pencil stick up on she ears, and when he take a pint at she he realise that this restaurant work only part-time as far as she concern, because she look as if she sleepy.

What you go do? She must be only getting a few dollars from the chinee man, and she can't live on that.

He realise suddenly that he bothering about the woman when he himself catching his tail,[3] so he shake his head and look down at the menu.

He mad to order a portion of everything—fry rice, chicken chop-suey, roast pork, chicken chow-min, birdnest soup, chicken broth, and one of them big salad with big slice of tomato and onion.

He think again about the last calypso season, when he was holding big and uses to go up by the high-class chinee restaurant in St. Vincent Street. He think how sometimes you does have so much food that you eat till you sick, and another time you can't even see you way to hustle a rock and mauby. It should have some way that when you have the chance you could eat enough to last you for a week or a month, and he make a plan right there, that the next time he have money (oh God) he go make a big deposit in a restaurant, so that all he have to do is walk in and eat like stupidness.

But the woman getting impatienate. She say: "You taking a long time to make up you mind, mister, like you never eat in a restaurant before."

And he think again about the time when he had money, how

[3]Having a rough time

no frowsy woman could have talk to him so. He remember how them waitresses used to hustle to serve him, and one night the talk get around that Razor Blade, the Calypsonian, was in the place, and they insist that he give them a number. Which one it was again? The one about *Home and the Bachelor*.

"Come come, make up you mind, mister, I have work to do."

So he order plain boil rice and chicken stew, because the way how he feeling, all them fancy chinee dish in only joke, he feel as if he want something like roast breadfruit and saltfish, something solid so when it go down in you belly you could feel it there.

And he tell the woman to bring a drink of Barbados rum first thing, because he know how they does take long to bring food in them restaurant, and he could coast with the rum in the meantime.

When he begin to coast with the rum, his head feel giddy, because is a long time since he hit a rum, and his stomach surprise when it feel the liquor.

Every two three thoughts he have, he thinking "Oh God" with them, as if "Oh God" is something that must go with everything. Like: "Oh God them was good days." And: "Oh God it making hot today."

By the time the food come he so hungry he could hardly wait, he fall down on the plate of rice and chicken as if is the first time he see food, and in three minute everything finish. He drink two glass of ice water, and he pick up a matchstick from the ground and begin to pick his teeth, and he lean back in the chair.

And is just as if he seeing the world for the first time, he feel like a million, he feel like a lord; he give a loud belch and bring up some of the chicken and rice to his throat; when he swallow it back down it taste sour.

He thinking how it had a time[4] a American fellar hear a calypso in Trinidad and he went back to the States and he get it set up to music and thing, and he get the Andrew Sisters to sing it, and the song make money like hell, it was on Hit Parade and all; wherever you turn, you only hearing people singing that calypso. This time so, the poor calypsonian who did really write the song catching hell in Trinidad; it was only when some smart lawyer friend tell him about copyright and that sort of business that he wake up. He went to America, and how you don't know he get a lot of money after the case did fix up in New York?

Razor Blade know the story good; whenever he write a

[4]About the time

calypso, he always praying that some bigshot from America would hear it and like it, and want to set it up good. The Blade uses to go in Frederick Street and Marine Square by the one two music shops and look at all the popular songs set up in notes and words, with the name of the fellar who write it big on the front, and sometimes his photograph too. And Razor Blade uses to think: But why I can't write song like that too, and have my name all over the place?

And when things was good with him, he went inside now and then, and tell the clerks that he does write calypso. But they only laugh at him, because they does think that calypso is no song at all, that what is song is numbers like *I've Got You Under My Skin* and *Sentimental Journey,* what real American composers write.

And the Blade uses to argue that every dog has his day, and that a time would come when people singing calypso all over the world like stupidness.

He thinking about all that as he lean back there in the chinee man restaurant.

Is to peel off now without paying! The best way is to play brassface, do as if you own the damn restaurant, and walk out cool.

So he get up and he notice the waitress not around, and he take time and walk out, passing by the cashier who writing something in a book.

When the waitress find out Razor Blade gone without paying, she start to make one set of noise, and a chinee man from the kitchen dash outside to see if he could see him, but this time so Razor Blade making races down Frederick Street.

The owner of the restaurant tell the woman she have to pay for the food that Razor Blade eat, that was she fault. She begin to cry big water, because is a lot of food that the Blade put away, and she know that that mean two three dollars from she small salary.

This time so, Razor Blade laughing like hell; he quite down by the Railway Station, and he know nobody could catch him now.

One set of rain start to fall suddenly; Razor Blade walking like a king in his new shoes, and no water getting up in his foot this time, so he ain't even bothering to shelter.

And he don't know why, but same time he get a sharp idea for a calypso. About how a man does catch his royal arse when he can't get a work noway.

The calypso would say about how he see some real hard days; he start to think up words right away as he walking in the rain:

It had a time in this colony
When everybody have money excepting me
I can't get a work no matter how I try
It look as if good times pass me by.

He start to hum it to the tune of a old calypso (*Man Centipede Bad Too Bad*) just to see how it shaping up. And he think about One Foot Harper, the one man who could help him out with a tune. Everytime when he think of a calypso, he uses to go round by One Foot, who was one of them old tests surviving from the days when calypso first start up in Trinidad. And One Foot used to help him with the music.

It had a big joke with One Foot one time. Somebody tief One Foot crutch one day when he was catching a sleep under the weeping willow tree in Woodford Square, and One Foot had was to stay in the square for a whole day and night. You could imagine how he curse stink; everybody only standing up and laughing like hell; nobody won't lend a hand, and if wasn't for Razor Blade, now so One Foot might still be waiting under the weeping willow tree for somebody to get a crutch for him. But the old Blade ease up the situation, and since that time, the both of them good friends.

So Razor Blade start making a tack for the tailor shop which part One Foot does always be hanging out, because One Foot ain't working noway, and every day he there by the tailor shop, sitting down on a soapbox and talking balls.

But don't fret you head, One Foot ain't no fool; it had a time in the old days when they uses to call him King of Calypso, and he was really good.

Razor Blade meet One Foot in a big old talk about the time when the Town Hall did burn down (One Foot was saying he know the fellar who start the fire). When Foot see him, he stop arguing right away and he say:

"What happening paleets, long time no see."

Razor Blade say: "Look man, I have a sharp idea for a calypso. Let we go in the back of the shop and work it out."

But Foot comfortable on the soapbox. He say: "Take ease, don't rush me. What about the shilling you have for me, that you borrow last week?"

The Blade turn his pockets inside out, and a pair of dice roll out, and a penknife fall on the ground.

"Boy, I ain't have cent. I broken. I bawling. If you stick me with a pin you won't draw blood."

"Don't worry with that kind of talk, is so with all-you fellars,

you does borrow a man money and then forget his address."

"I telling you man," Razor Blade talk as if he in a big hurry, but is only to get away from the topic, "you don't believe me?"

But the Foot cagey. He say: "All right, all right, but I telling you in front that if you want money borrow again, you come to the wrong man. I ain't lending you a nail till you pay me back that shilling."

"Come man, do quick." Razor Blade make as if to go behind the shop. Same time he see Rahamut, the Indian tailor.

"What happening Indian, things looking good with you," Blade offer.

Rahamut stop stitching a khaki pants and look at the Blade.

"You and One Foot always using my shop, all-you will have to give me a commission."

"Well, you know how it is, sometimes you up, sometimes you down. Right now I so down that bottom and I same thing."

"Well old man is a funny thing but I never see you when you up."

"Ah, but wait till the calypso season start."

"Then you won't come round here at all. Then you is bigshot, you forget smallfry like Rahamut."

Well Razor Blade don't know what again to tell Rahamut, because is really true all what the Indian saying. And he think about these days when anybody tell him anything, all he could say is: "Wait until the calypso season start up," as if when the calypso season start up God go come to earth and make everybody happy.

So what he do is he laugh kiff-kiff and give Rahamut a pat on the back like they is good friends.

Same time One Foot come up, so they went and sit down by a dilapidate-up table in the back.

Blade say: "Listen to these words old man, you never hear calypso like this in you born days," and he start to give the Foot the words.

But from the time he start, One Foot shake his fingers in his ears and bawl out: "Oh God old man, you can't think up something new, is the same old words every year."

"But how you mean man," the Blade say, "this is calypso father. Wait until you hear the whole thing."

They begin to work on the song, and One Foot so good that in two-twos he fix up a tune. Blade pick up a empty bottle and a piece of stick, and One Foot start beating the table, and is so they getting on, singing this new calypso that they invent.

Well, Rahamut and another Indian fellar who does help him out with the sewing come up and listen.

"What you think of this new

number papa?" the Blade ask Rahamut.

Rahamut scratch his head and say: "Let me get that tune again."

So they begin again, beating on the table and bottle, and the Blade putting all he have in it.

When they finish the fellar who does help Rahamut say: "That is hearts."

But Rahamut say: "Why you don't shut you mouth? What all-you Indian know about calypso?"

And that cause a big laugh, everybody begin to laugh kya-kya, because Rahamut himself is a Indian.

One Foot turn to Razor Blade and say: "Listen to them two Indian how they arguing about we creole calypso. I never hear that in my born days!"

Razor Blade say: "All right, joke is joke, but you think it good? It really good?"

Rahamut want to say yes, it good, but he beating about the bush, he hemming and he hawing, he saying: "Well, it so-so," and "it not so bad," and "I hear a lot of worse ones."

But the fellar who does help Rahamut, he getting on as if he mad, he only hitting Razor Blade and One Foot on the shoulder and saying how he never hear a calypso like that. He swinging his hands all about in the air while he talking, and his hand hit Rahamut hand and Rahamut get a chook in his finger with a needle he was holding.

Well Rahamut put the finger in his mouth and start to suck it, and he turn round and start to abuse the other tailor fellar, saying why the arse you don't keep you tail quiet, look you make me chook[5] my hand with the blasted needle?

"Well what happen for that, you go dead because a needle chook you?" the fellar say.

Big argument start up; they forget all about the Blade calypso and start to talk about how people does get blood poison from pin and needle chook.

Afterwards Rahamut and the fellar went back to finish off a zootsuit that a customer was going to call for in the evening.

Now Blade want to ask Foot to borrow him a shilling, but he don't know how to start, especially as he owe him already. So he begin to talk sweet, praising up the tune that One Foot invent, saying he never hear a tune so sweet.

But as soon as he start to come like that, the old Foot get cagey, and say: "Oh God old man, don't mamaguile[6] me."

So Blade ease up on the guism, and he begin to talk about how he spend the morning, how he ups the shoes from

[5]Cut
[6]Blarney

by the shoemaker shop in Park Street, and how he eat big for nothing.

One Foot say: "I bet you get in trouble, all-you fellars does take some brave risk."

Razor say: "Man, it easy as kissing hand, is only because you have one foot and can't run fast, that's why you talking so."

Foot say: "No jokes about my one foot."

Razor say: "Listen man, you and me could work up a good scheme to get some money. I go do everything, all I want you to do is to keep watchman for me to see if anybody coming."

"What is this scheme you have?"

To tell truth, the Blade ain't have nothing cut and dry in the old brain; all he thinking is that he go make a big tief somewhere where have money.

"What about the Roxy Theatre down St. James?" he ask Foot.

But Foot not in harmony at all.

He say: "Man, why you don't try and get a work somewhere till the calypso season start up? You sure to get catch if you try anything like that."

"But man look how I get away with the shoes and all that food! All you have to do is play boldface and you could commit murder and get away free."

The Foot start to hum a old calypso:

"If a man have money today . . .
He could commit murder and get away free
And live in the Governor's company . . ."

Blade begin to get vex. "So you don't like the idea?"

"You ain't have no practice. You is a novice. Crime does not pay."

"You is a damn coward!"

"Us calypsonians have to keep we dignity."

"You go to hell! If you won't help me I go do it by myself!"

"Well papa, don't say I didn't want to warn you."

"Man Foot, the trouble with you is you only have one foot, so you can't think like me."

The Foot get hot. He say: Listen, I tell you already no jokes about my one foot, you hear? Curse my father, curse my mother, but don't tell me nothing about my foot."

The Blade relent. "I sorry Foot, I know you don't like nobody to give you jokes."

But all the same, when he peel off from by the tailor shop, the Blade thinking hard about this big tief he go do, how he go have so much money he could go British Guiana or even the States.

Well he find himself quite round by the Queen's Park Savannah, and walking and

thinking. And he see a old woman selling orange. The woman as if she sleeping in the heat, she propping up she chin with one hand, and she head bend down low. Few people passing; the old Blade size up the situation in one glance.

He mad to bounce a orange from the tray, just to show he could do it and get away. Just pass up near—don't even look down at the tray—and lift up one easy as you walking, and put it in you pocket.

He wish the Foot was there to see how easy it was to do.

But he hardly put the orange in his pocket when the old woman jump up and start to make one set of noise, bawling out: "Tief, tief! Look a man tief a orange from me! Hold 'im! Don't let 'im get away!"

And is as if that bawling start a pliers working on part of him right away; he forget everything he was thinking and he start to make races across the savannah. He look back and he see three fellars chasing him.

And is just as if he can't feel nothing at all but the pliers, as if he not running, as if he standing up on one spot. The only thing is the pliers going clip, clip, and he gasping, "Oh God, Oh God."

ANSWER TO SAINT-O-GRAM . **(See page 40)**

The visitor was an elderly white-haired gentleman with the understanding eyes and air of tremendous discretion which one associates in imagination with the classical type of family solicitor that he immediately confessed himself to be.

Story—THE EXPORT TRADE

IN NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE—

OPEN ALL NIGHT . . . . . *by* LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN
MURDER OF A MAHARAJAH . . . *by* CHRISTOPHER BUSH
BETRAYAL OF THE HOPELESS . . . . *by* JOHN CREASEY
WALKUP TO FEAR . . . . . *by* MAYSIE GREIG
FOR THE GOOD OF THE CITY . *by* ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE

—of *your* THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

the one-eyed engineer

by . . . George Fielding Eliot

The glitter in that eye hadn't been hate, but calculation. For of course it was One Eye who'd slammed that door shut . . . .

THE second engineer had a black patch over his left eye.

Johnny Bolton, clattering down the steel ladder, wondered about that. He'd never seen a one-eyed engineer on duty in a ship's engineroom before. Oh, well, the physical qualifications of engineer officers weren't the affair of the U. S. Customs Service. Let the Coast Guard worry about it.

Johnny strode across the floor plates, nodding to the one-eyed man.

"Customs search," he announced.

The single eye glittered as it looked him over, from the blue uniform cap sent slightly aslant on his rusty hair on down the whole wiry dungaree-clad six-foot length of him. That eye seemed to miss no detail—neither the Customs badge nor the holstered gun nor the flashlight in his pocket—and it didn't seem to like what it saw.

"'Okay," said the eye's owner sourly. "Get on with it, grappler. You won't find nothin'."

George Fielding Eliot returns with this exciting story of Grappler Bolton, member of that proud little band of specialists, the Customs Searching Squads. Searching engine and firerooms for heroin, opium, maybe diamonds, anything man might try to smuggle into the country, Johnny Bolton is a new kind of detective, taking his life in his hands every time he comes closer and closer to what he is hunting. You will find him exciting.

He turned and walked away, heading for the open door of the engineer storeroom.

So, thought Johnny: wise guy. Grappler was the waterfront slang for men like Johnny—the members of that proud little band of specialists, the Customs Searching Squads. It was not a term of endearment. The hell with him. Johnny went to work—he didn't need to ask any questions to find his way around; searching engine and fire rooms was his particular dish. The waterfront knew him as Alley Cat Bolton because of the time he'd found six pounds of heroin suspended under a floor-grating in the shaft-alley of a French steamer.

He didn't expect to find anything like that here. The tip that had brought the searchers to this SS Manosa had indicated that somebody in the deck force had connections with a junk-jewelry smuggling ring; Inspector Cavanaugh and the rest of the boys were up above giving the crew spaces a thorough combing. Cavanaugh was short-handed this morning, so Johnny was working the engineer department by himself, just as a matter of routine. He went at the job methodically, sending his flashlight ray probing into dark corners, using his angle-mirror where necessary, p r o w l i n g through the fire-rooms where the main boilers stood black and cold, though oil-flame rumbled under the auxiliary boiler that supplied steam to the dynamo-turbine and the galley. He knelt and squinted through a pile of spare boiler-tubes; he climbed up to look in the top row of spare-parts bins in the storeroom; he squeezed his way between pumps and evaporators, went up and over the starting platform and down on the other side, walked aft again—and all the time, while his own trained eyes missed nothing, he was aware of that other eye always following him.

There was hate in its glitter—Johnny couldn't understand that, he told himself he must be mistaken. He was very sure he'd never seen this greasy-haired engineer before. Instinct—the unfailing sixth sense that is the Customs searcher's stock in trade—said look out. Something wrong here, insisted instinct. Why's he all alone? Why no oiler, no fireman, no storekeeper on the job? Why does he keep watching you like that?

Johnny went around the bilge pump and saw the door of the shaft-alley standing wide open in the after bulkhead. Johnny never missed taking a look in the shaft-alley since that big heroin find.

The one-eyed engineer was clear across the engine-room, fiddling with some connection on the refrigerating compressor: again Johnny caught the flicker

of reflected electric light on that single eye.

He stepped over the coaming of the water-tight door into the shaft-alley, stooping to accommodate his lanky body to a five-and-a-half foot clearance. Ahead of him, the gleaming propeller shaft, supported by bearings at intervals, ran back to the packing gland in the stern of the ship.

A single bulb far along the steel tunnel made a patch of light. The rest was blackness, into which the ray of Johnny's torch probed feebly. Johnny moved aft, slow and careful, swinging the torch-ray from side to side and along the steel gratings on which he walked. The air was heavy with the reek of dirty bilges and stale oil—Johnny sniffed, his educated nose told him that sometime during the voyage one of the shaft-bearings had been allowed to run hot.

He was about half-way to the stern of the ship when he heard the bulkhead door slam behind him. He whirled, striking his head on a steel frame—he almost dropped his torch with the shock of pain.

Ahead of him, darkness. The door was shut. He could hear a crunching noise—somebody was forcing down the dogs that held the door tightly in place. Johnny was r u n n i n g now—running along that stifling tunnel of steel, desperate to reach the door before it could be secured. His flashlight beam reached it, played on its drab steel surface—

And showed him that there were no dog-handles on the inside.

Which meant that once the dogs were shoved into place, they could be opened only from the engine-room side.

He reached the door, flung his weight against it. It was as solid as the bulkhead itself.

The glitter in that eye hadn't been hate, but calculation. For of course it was One-Eyed who'd slammed that door shut. He'd just been waiting for the opportunity that Johnny'd been fool enough to give him. Now he'd dig up whatever he had hidden out there in the engine-room—dope, probably, maybe diamonds—and there was just a chance that he might get off the ship with it.

Johnny fought back the impulse to sart hammering on the door with his pistol-butt, in the hope that Cavanagh or one of the boys might hear him. Hammering noises in engine-rooms were nothing unusual. Cool head, careful thinking—he had to get that door open before One-Eye got away: or he'd never hear the end of the snickering. Alley Cat Bolton—ha.

Alley Rat they'd call him, telling with jeering laughter the tale of how he was trapped like a rat in a drain. The Chief might

even send him back to port patrol duty.

Unless he got out of there before One-Eye made his getaway. One hope—the engineer might think he had plenty of time, and be over-cautious.

The fact remained that there was no way for Johnny to get out of the shaft-alley except through the door.

He swung his torch-ray around the edge of the door. Nine dogs, altogether—when fully clamped they squeezed the rubber seal on the edges of the door firmly against the bulkhead, making the door water-tight. There were two dogs each at top and bottom, two between the hinges, and three on the outer edge, equally spaced. The dogs were secured by pins which passed through the bulkhead, with nuts at each end—on most water-tight doors, each pin held two dog-handles, one on each end, so that the door could be opened or closed from either side. But some penny-pinching shipbuilder hadn't seen any possibility that anyone would ever want to operate a shaft-alley door from inside, so he'd left the inside handles off, thus saving a few bucks. All Johnny could see were the ends of the pins and the nuts that held them against the small steel blocks that had been substituted for the inside dog-handles.

He laughed suddenly. Nuts. What was he waiting for? He reached into the inside tool pocket of his dungaree jumper, took out an adjustable open-end wrench, and went to work on the middle nut on the outer or swinging edge of the door.

One-Eye apparently didn't know that "grapplers" always had tools in their pockets for the purpose of gaining access to the thousand-odd places where something can be hidden in the complex interiors of ships.

The nuts didn't turn easily at first; the handle of the wrench wasn't long enough to give Johnny all the leverage he needed.

But it turned faster after he finally got it started—in another minute he had it off. The door didn't yield to pressure. One-Eye hadn't depended on one dog—he'd fastened others.

How many others? All of them? Not likely. Why go to all that trouble? Maybe just one or two more—the remaining two on the opening edge of the door, perhaps.

Johnny fitted his wrench over the upper of the two indicated nuts. This one didn't give at all. Somebody'd really set up on it—probably with a long-handled wrench a man could get both hands on.

The air was getting worse. Johnny's head throbbed, he was beginning to pant for breath. Take it easy, Johnny. Make every move count—

Just beside him, something shrieked like a banshee.

It took him a second to realize what it was—the whistler on the end of a voice tube. His torch-ray searched for it, found it: it was attached to the bulkhead close to the door; he should have noticed it before. More carelessness.

He snapped it open, hope surging—

"Bolton!" he said into the mouth-piece. "That you, Dan?"

"Nah, grappler, it ain't Dan," the voice-tube told him. "It's an old pal o' yours—remember that night on Pier 18 last year? Remember chasin' a couple guys down the pier till they got away in a launch? Remember standin' on the end o' the pier shootin' at 'em? One o' your goddam bullets snapped a splinter into my eye that night, grappler. So I been waitin' an' hopin' to see ya again: wit' the one eye ya left me. You don't know me by sight, grappler, but I know your ugly mug all right."

"You'd better open that door, you fool," barked Johnny. "Interfering with a Federal officer's a penitentiary offense."

Mocking laughter echoed through the voice-tube.

"You won't be there to swear to it, grappler," the voice informed him—something about that voice was beginning to give Johnny the creeps. "Know what I'm gonna do? I got a steam hose rigged to that stand-by boiler—I'm gonna fix a length o' pipe on the other end of it, then I'll get down in the double bottoms an' shove the pipe through the holes in the frames until the end of it's right underneath them grat-in's yer standin' on. An' then, Mister Alley Cat Bolton, I'm gonna turn on the steam an' cook ya."

Johnny's blood froze in his veins.

"You'll burn in the chair if you do," he shouted.

"I'll be long gone when they find ya," retorted the voice. "Okay, I gotta git to work. I'll give ya a few minutes to think about what's comin'. If ya wanta beg, ya can hammer on the door. I'd like that, grappler. Don't bother whistlin' in the tube—it just goes to the startin' platform, an' I'm pluggin' it up anyway. G'bye now."

Only one chance—to get that door open before One-Eye could finish his murderous preparations. Desperately Johnny tugged at that stubborn nut—he couldn't budge it.

He took out his gun, made sure the safety was on, tapped the wrench handle with the steel-shod butt. One-Eye might hear the noise, might think Johnny was "beggin'." No matter for that as long as he didn't guess what Johnny was really doing. If he did, he might set up all the dogs. And Johnny, forcing his

mind to cold calculation, decided that he probably didn't have time to get off more than one or two more nuts. His life depended on there being only that many dogs secured—and g u e s s i n g which ones.

The nut was beginning to turn. Tap-tap-tap—it moved a little more. He tried it with the wrench alone. Still it resisted. Tap-tap. A little easier. Using all his strength he could turn it now—once around—twice—it fought him with all the inborn cussedness of inanimate objects, but it was coming. He was dripping with sweat by the time he had it in his hand. He tried the door again. It was immovable.

His head was buzzing—the bad air was getting him. But to collapse was to die in the steam—

Listening, he could hear a distant metallic clanging. He guessed what that was—One-Eye pulling aside a floor-plate in the engine-room to get down into the bilge. He attacked the third nut—the only remaining one on the swinging side of the door. He had to gamble on those three being the only dogs One-Eye had bothered to make fast. He'd hardly have time for any more—

To his delight, this nut started easily and came right off without trouble. There was a metallic scraping down underneath somewhere—One-Eye was passing that steam-pipe through the round holes in the ship's framing members.

He set his shoulder against the door again.

It gave! It moved a tiny fraction of an inch.

Again—no more give. But it wouldn't have moved at all if any dogs were still fastened—

He flung his whole weight on the stubborn steel. The faintest crack of yellow light appeared at the edge of the door: but try as he would he could not budge it another millimeter.

It came to him then—the door was pushing against the dogs, which were still clamped down. True, the pins that held the dogs in place no longer had nuts on the ends of them: but the swinging door could not draw those pins straight out of the holes into which they were fitted. They'd have to be driven out to release the door.

The scraping noise was right under his feet now.

The steam pipe was there.

Using his wrench as a hammer, Johnny battered at the threaded end of the upper-most dog-pin. It moved—it receded into the steel block in which it was set. When it was flush with the end of the block, Johnny took out his heaviest screw-driver and used that as a punch to drive the pin still farther back.

From below, a sepulchral voice that sounded as though it came from the grave mocked at him:

"I hear ya beggin', Alley Cat. Beg some more."

Johnny was attacking the second pin. As it in turn came flush with the steel, the door sagged open maybe a quarter of an inch.

"I'm gonna go turn on the steam now, Alley Cat," said the voice.

It might take him a minute or two to get out of the double-bottoms and back to the engine room. If he looked at the door then, he couldn't miss seeing those loosened dogs—but he might be too intent on getting to that steam valve—

Third pin—this one was stubborn. Johnny hammered at it furiously— Any second now, the searing steam might roar up through that grating— The steam in the auxiliary boiler wouldn't be superheated, but it'd be plenty hot enough to do just what One-Eye said—to cook Johnny till the flesh melted from his bones. Superheated steam'd be better in a way—it'd kill him quicker.

Bang-bang—the pin was moving at last—

A startled yell came through the crack in the door. One-Eye had seen—feet hammered on floor-plates—receding! He was running for the steam-valve instead of trying to refasten the door—

Choking and gasping in the fetid air, Johnny kept hammering.

The door suddenly edged open a full half-inch, impelled by the yielding pin.

Johnny hurled himself at it and it flew open with a crash, sending him sprawling on the floor-plates as a roaring white cloud of steam burst up through the shaft-alley gratings. The cruel hot lash of it was across his face and neck as he staggered to his feet—then he was away from it, charging across the engine room with his right hand clawing his gun from its holster.

One-Eye would be in the fireroom—

Too late Johnny saw a flicker of movement on the starting platform, above him—too late he jerked up his gun for a desperate snapshot—the hurled spanner thudded against his wrist, gun and spanner clanged together on the steel flooring—

And One-Eye came over the rail of the starting platform like a human projectile, crashing into Johnny and sending him back and down so that his head smacked solidly against the plates. The overhead lights scattered in a shower of incandescent stars—regrouped—steadied as Johnny fought off the blackout that would mean death— He realized that his left arm was pumping blows against something that didn't seem to feel them—something that gasped and grunted, but kept dragging him along with the strength of inexorable purpose—

"You're goin' back in there—to cook—"

He was hauling Johnny by one arm and the collar of his dungaree jumper toward the shaft-alley door, from which the terrible steam still rushed out and poured upward toward the fiddley.

Johnny stopped using his one good hand for useless hammering at One-Eye's legs and grabbed a pipe connection. He clung to it desperately, concentrating all his disordered powers on maintaining that grip. One-Eye braced himself and heaved—his foot slipped, and almost fell: he got his foot against the base of a lub-oil pump and heaved again. Johnny's fingers were torn from their hold, but instantly he wrapped his arm around the pump-base. Life was coming back into his body—he could feel his legs now— One-Eye spat a curse at him and snatched one of the steel dogs that lay scattered on the floor.

"Take it this way, then!" he squalled, swinging for Johnny's head. Johnny rolled away from that deadly blow, came to his knees, flinging up his right arm to guard his head from the next attack—he couldn't keep this going for long—he was still dazed and sick, he had to win his minutes one by one, hoping each one would gain another—until—

Feet clattered on steel steps—a voice roared:

"Drop that, quick! Or get shot!"

Cavanaugh's voice—and here came burly Cavanaugh himself, half running, half-falling down the steep ladder, gun out and ready and two of Johnny's mates right behind him.

Cavanaugh grabbed One-Eye while the others lifted Johnny to his feet.

"Thanks, Dan," he gasped. "Just in time. Keep clear of that steam—it's live."

"Damn grapplers!" snarled One-Eye. "How the hell didja know—?"

Johnny gestured weakly toward the steam pouring out of the shaft-alley door and up the wide hatchway.

"You fool," he said, his voice growing firmer with each word, "what'd you think I was hanging on to things for? All I had to do was gain a couple minutes—or did you suppose the Inspector wouldn't see that steam and come to find out what gave? Hell, it must be shooting up higher'n the mastheads!"

"What's this all about?" demanded Inspector Cavanaugh.

Johnny was fishing in his pocket with his good left hand.

"Attempted murder," he told Cavanaugh. "Mind holding that guy's wrists, Inspector? My right hand's out of whack—but I'd kinda like to put the cuffs on him myself. He damn' near had me fricasseed."

last window

by . . . Winston Marks

There was a moment when he knew he was asking himself—is the price of freedom ever too high?

HE RIFFLED the bills with experienced fingers grown clumsy with disuse, made the neat entry in the yellow pass-book and pushed it back to the round-faced lady. As she moved away from his window he shook his head and fought back the tears.

It was still unreal. Three nights ago he had slept in the prison cell that had been his home for four years.

Yet, this job was no accident. Three windows up from his was the profile of his ex-cellmate, Ernie Collins, who had been released six months ago. Ernie claimed he had no pull at this little bank, but it was he who put in the plug for John Alexander, ex-teller, ex-embezzler, ex-chump!

The warden had said, "I think it's crazy, too, Alexander. But it's a privately operated bank, and the old man has a theory. Collins has worked out fine for him, and Ernie put old Banning in touch with us when it was time for you to leave. So, there it is. Take it or leave it."

John had taken it—gratefully.

Three nights earlier John Alexander had been in jail. And here he was, a little clumsy at it perhaps—understandable, after the last years—a teller in old man Banning's bank. Winston Marks, who has contributed several stories to our companion magazine, FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *describes the conflict within Alexander as he suddenly has to make a decision—about himself.*

A man couldn't turn down a break like this, leery or not. He looked up the row to the chief teller's cage. Some day he'd be back up there. Thirty-two wasn't too old to start over again at the last window.

A hand touched his shoulder, and old Banning smiled at his startled jump. "Relax, man," he said. "Hate to rush you along, but you're promoted. Balfour's on leave of absence. Take the next window, will you?"

With sweating hands he closed the little walnut gates, checked out his cash and moved up one window. Two days on the job, and he had a promotion! Such luck couldn't last. Something was bound to go wrong.

He knew what it was that likely would go wrong when he sniffed the perfume of the pretty girl who replaced him at the last window.

Pretty? She was a dream! Here he was, not yet accustomed to moving among free *men,* and they socked a gorgeous, blue-eyed starlet next to him and expected him to concentrate. His freedom and job were so precious that he almost resented the girl and the way his heart pounded at her nearness.

Banning introduced them, and she gave him a small smile and a thorough look that said he had not lost all his attraction for women. "Sort of keep an eye on her and help her out," Banning whispered a moment later. "She's handled money before, but she doesn't have your experience."

It should have made him feel good, but it gave him a feeling of foreboding. The old prison leeriness returned. Recognizing the anti-social symptoms in himself he deliberately made the effort. When their windows were both empty for the first time he said, "Welcome to the banking business."

"Thanks," she said. "They call me Kate. And you?"

"I'm John," he said and decided that the blonde hair was natural. A thousand days of loneliness surged up in him and his throat thickened so he could say no more, but each chance he had he watched her.

Once she reached for a proffered check, turned it over with her left hand and revealed a wedding ring.

Disappointment number one! Not that he had any right to even dream at this stage, but it was like a cold plunge. He tore his eyes from her, determined not to torture himself. There was so much to unlearn—and learn—with the privilege of freedom went the responsibility of self-control.

For two days he pretended there was no one to his left, but on the third day his gaze drifted back out of a different kind of

curiosity. She was brand new to the job, yet she hadn't asked him a single question.

Taking notice of her work he made a horrible discovery. She was making some errors of procedure, and they looked very much like deliberate, dishonest errors. He said nothing and waited until next day. Apparently she had made her books balance, in spite of the discrepancies. That meant she had made compensating false entries.

Now he watched her every move. She was casual about it but not particularly clever. When she left her window to have a check okayed by an officer, John stepped over with a hundred-dollar-bill and changed it to ones and fives from her drawer, making a quick check of her cash as he did so.

His suspicions were confirmed. The dream-girl was playing hop-scotch with her entries.

It didn't make sense. No one ever went wrong on the last window. They were too busy breaking in on the job. You had to learn the system before you could hope to cheat it—and even when you knew it, it was foolishness to try it, he remembered bitterly.

Then he remembered that she had asked no questions. She must have been a banker elsewhere, and it looked like she was trying for a small but quick take. Was it possible that she, too, was an ex-convict? If so, Banning was insane! You couldn't cram a bank full of embezzlers and expect—

Kate Wilson returned fluttering the check nonchalantly. Her lovely complexion revealed no prison pallor, but then make-up could conceal that.

As the day wore on he debated the thing frantically. He had her "cold" at any moment he chose to crack down on her. The irrational fact was, he couldn't tolerate the thought of Kate Wilson in prison. She would be lost to him forever.

There was another way, a very tempting way that was suggested when she pointedly confided in him that she wasn't living with her husband.

That evening she was slow closing her account. He stalled so he could follow her. She walked three blocks and entered a modest apartment hotel. She seemed startled to see him follow her into the elevator.

When they were alone on the third floor he took her key, opened the door to her suite, made her sit down and began to pace the floor. She was silent as if she knew what was coming.

Her eyes narrowed expectantly, but her face showed nothing else. He was in the blackmail seat, and they both knew it. "You're a sitting duck, Kate," he told her, "just like I was. Ex-

cept that I faced the examiners, and they don't bargain."

Her voice was soft and level. "The important question is, what are you going to do about it? I haven't stolen enough yet to make it worth your while to keep quiet. So—what else do you want from me?"

Stated so baldly, his position lost its last shred of glamor. The lustful compulsion that had dragged him here faded. Like a crazy fool he'd fallen in love with her, and love drives a perverse bargain. "I want only one thing," he said stiffly. "I want you to replace the money tomorrow, and then—get out of my life!"

Her full, pretty mouth opened.

He cursed himself for a compound sucker, but there was something in her face he wanted to stay there, something he couldn't define, but it was missing from the faces of people in prison. It had to do with decency and self-respect.

He stopped at the door. "See you in the morning," he said simply, and he tried hard to believe that he would.

He did. She wasn't at her window, but when Banning called him into his private office, there she sat on the edge of the executive's desk with a set, remorseful expression.

Banning grinned at him. "You passed the first test, Alexander, but Kate says you're a cinch to flunk the next one."

The blood rushed to John's face in anger, humiliation and resentment. So the whole thing was a rotten trap! Here he'd accused himself of being overly suspicious of the set-up. How stupid could a man get! "What's the next test? Do I sing Rock of Ages?"

"The next and *last test,*" Banning said, "is whether you can forgive us for the stinking first test. You made my secretary so ashamed of herself she says she wouldn't blame you if you didn't."

John's eyes ran over her for one last inventory. He didn't want ever to forget this female Judas. Her chin was down, and she regarded him from under her long lashes. Then something else caught his attention. There was no wedding ring on her left hand. She saw him staring at it and clasped her hands behind her self-consciously. Somehow that made a difference.

It was a bitter price to pay to be judged fit for human society, but suddenly the price didn't seem too high. "You play rough around here," he said, "but I guess the way back is never easy."

Kate's quick smile flashed at him, and now he knew he was doing right. The way back looked a little brighter, a little easier already.

port of intrigue

by . . . F. van Wyck Mason

"This Juan O'Quinn is a selfish butcher, and if he gets those munitions ten or twenty thousand poor devils will die . . . ."

"SENOR SANTOS?" The desk clerk's saddle-hued visage contracted. "*Pero si*—he will come downstairs in a moment."

Captain Hugh North, D.C.I., standing very tall and muscular before the reception desk of the Hotel Mirasol, raised mildly interested brows. "Indeed?"

"That gentleman also inquired for him." With an expressive yellow forefinger the clerk indicated an open doorway, beyond which a stretch of bar was visible. Neatly framed in this aperture stood an angular, leanly muscular figure in a perfectly fitting Palm Beach suit.

A brief smile flitted over Hugh North's gaunt brown visage as he advanced into the bar, where sundry Cuban gentlemen sipped their *refrescos de piñas* and noisily discussed last night's *jai alai* results.

It was significant that Captain North did not call Bruce Kilgour by name, for that sandy-haired and red-faced gentleman was of his Britannic Majesty's Intelligence Service, and it is not

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An exciting story of intrigue in the Caribbean. Captain Hugh North, DCI, *the almost legendary troubleshooter for that little known Washington department, had faced many crises, but few as serious as this. Failure would mean death to thousands of innocent people, "the kind of death you wouldn't wish on a yellow dog." It could mean American intervention, with perhaps hundreds of young marines coughing out their lives in the poisonous green jungles of Guatecata.*

From: THE SEVEN SEAS MURDERS. By van Wyck Mason
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considered *au fait* to call such acquaintances by name.

"Hullo, old fellow," was all North said, as the Englishman's craggy red features lit momentarily. "What flat stone have you been hiding under?"

The other grinned vaguely, nodded and turned to the busy bartender. *"Un presidente para el señor."*

Then he in the Palm Beach suit cast North a look which indicated a table set somewhat apart. Instantly the dark-haired American was aware that his premonitions had been correct. Things *were* bad here in Havana. Bruce Kilgour had never been one to get unduly alarmed over trifles, yet that bulge in his right coat pocket and a subtle something in his manner hinted at trouble—in serious proportions.

Very likely Kilgour, North told himself, was involved in the same ominous affair which had brought him from Washington as fast as a plane could fly. He hoped so. Experience had shown that the big sandy-haired British agent was "the shade of a rock in a weary land" when it came to delicate and dangerous situations.

Ruling his misgivings, North dropped into a chair opposite Kilgour who, with cocktail glass poised between powerful fingers was making a pretense of inspecting its contents.

"You weren't surprised to see me?" North smiled as he lit a fragrant brown Cuban cigarette.

"Hardly. Expected you yesterday, in fact. Things have been getting so deucedly hot down here, I thought G-2 would be sending the great Captain North this way." The Englishman's bright blue eyes in slow, wise humor met and lingered on the shrewd grey ones of the linen-clad American who sat tugging gently at his close-clipped black mustache.

"Naow dew tell, Major Kilgour," North drawled in an accurate imitation of a "down-east" twang. "But you're right. The State Department's plenty worried about the amiable General O'Quinn's projected ruckus in Guatecata."

It was hard, North found, to trifle; in his memory still rang the earnest warnings of his one and only superior. "You've got to locate that infernal arms shipment, North. *Go to!* Understand? This Juan O'Quinn is a selfish butcher, and if he gets those munitions ten or twenty thousand poor devils of peons, men, women and children, will die the kind of death you wouldn't wish on a yellow dog. Think of it, North! That callous swine O'Quinn *plans to use gas!* THE MEKA has sold him mustard gas!—along with Stokes mortars, flame throwers, and a lot of other modern frightfulness.

"Down in Havana," Fitz-Ambler had continued, "we've an agent—Esteban S a n t o s—working at the O'Quinn *junta* headquarters. Find him, no matter where he is, and co-operate. It'll be dangerous business, North, and you'll take your life in your hands the minute you land, but remember, we've *got* to learn where that shipload of munitions is to be landed."

Unseeingly the Intelligence Captain's somber gaze wandered out into the glaring sunshine of the narrow, crowded street outside the Mirasol's bar. Yes, old Fitz-Ambler had been terribly upset—and well he might be. If O'Quinn's filibustering hellions made a shambles of Guatecata the other little banana republics would inevitably be drawn into the turmoil, and that of course would lead to the grim business of an American intervention, with perhaps hundreds of husky young marines coughing out their lives amid the poisonous green jungles of the isthmus.

A white-coated *mozo* deftly setting down North's cocktail aroused him from his discouraging reflections, and when once the boy had hurried off with long apron slatting about his legs, North hurriedly surveyed the voluble patrons of the bar.

"The MEKA again?" he demanded in a low tone. "Looked like it to us in G-2."

The line of Major Bruce Kilgour's angular jaw contracted. "Right. Van Zastrow and those cold-blooded blackguards in the *Mittel Europäische Kriegsvorrat Ausfuhrgeschaft* are b a c k i n g O'Quinn—and to hell with ethics!"

North's fingers tightened on his glass stem. "Even if Kurt Von Zastrow is a steel king and a lot of his satellites hold down government portfolios, the directors of the MEKA ought to be lined up against a wall and shot for the good of society."

Inexplicably, a premonition of disaster invaded North's consciousness, and again his deep-set eyes swept the bar, and then peered through iron-barred windows into a tiled patio where several macaws, gorgeous as living flowers, preened themselves in the late afternoon. Nothing even faintly ominous was to be seen—so he cursed himself for an overimaginative fool. Later, perhaps, there would be danger, plenty of it, but now—all was peaceful and gay.

"Nervous, eh?" Kilgour grinned. "Wait 'til you've been here a while. I've been shot at once, and Dumourier, the French agent, got knocked out by some thugs last night. He's still unconscious, last report."

"So the French are out to protect investments, too?"

"Rather! So are we. There are five million pounds of British capital invested in Guatecata.

Downing Street's out to stop O'Quinn and to put a wrench in MEKA's gears at the same time. But we're too late, I'm afraid. Only got wind of this last Friday."

"That's the beauty of being in the Intelligence," North remarked bitterly. "Maybe you've noticed it? What about this Santos hombre? Apparently you've been working with him—even if he is our man."

"Oh, was he?" Kilgour looked amiably blank. "A clever chap, too. Phoned me in a great stew about an hour ago—said he'd located definite data on the O'Quinn shipment."

North's straight black brows merged for an instant. "Suppose we go up there. Better than being seen together down here, eh?"

Kilgour shrugged a little and smiled mirthlessly. "Right. Really your show, you know. Dear old Monroe Doctrine, and all that!"

"To hell with it!" North, who had had certain previous turbulent dealings with the myrmidons of MEKA, gulped the rest of his drink, got up and flung a forty centavo piece ringing among the glasses on the bar. He sighed as they turned to the door. It was nice to be back in Havana again — a city which appealed to his cosmopolitan tastes more than any other in the Western Hemisphere.

But the thought of those choking yellow clouds of gas drifting through moist jungles to strangle, poison and terrify so many ignorant people weighed on him. Today, or by tonight at the latest, he must make such an atrocity impossible. Somewhere out on the blue Caribbean a number of sleek, gray American destroyers cruised aimlessly, waiting, waiting.

Bruce Kilgour apparently was familiar with the number of Señor Santos' room, for without hesitation he crossed the palm-shaded patio, and led on across its handsome old red tiles to a stair leading upward on the exterior of the building.

They had just set foot to a flight of worn stone steps when North, with the agility of a leopard, flattened himself against the wall. A ponderous red tile hurtled by, barely missing his head and shattered itself on the patio pavement with such violence that the macaws shrieked in alarm.

"Qué lástima," babbled a badly frightened assistant manager. "In many months that is the first tile to fall. Our deepest apologies, Señor!"

"No harm done," the Intelligence Captain replied in an emotionless monotone, but his Indian-like face grew even gaunter than usual while he scanned the triple row of windows just above.

Kilgour removed a hand from that weighted coat pocket of his. "Reception committee seems to be a trifle over-anxious."

"Energetic lads, Bruce, and always on the job. Kurt von Zastrow picks 'em that way."

Once they were inside the Hotel Mirasol's north wing, Kilgour led up a flight of stairs to a high-ceilinged corridor, and pausing, again sought the heavy object in his coat pocket; for from behind the door panels of room 37 sounded a low, buzzing sound. So, his angular form perceptibly gathering itself, Bruce Kilgour knocked on the door panels.

"Santos!" Kilgour cautiously called. "This is Kilgour. I say, Santos, I must see you at once."

When inside the room sounded an indistinct scraping noise North's hand shot out, seized the small brass doorknob and flung open the door.

"Santos? My God!" The Englishman brushed by North's tensed figure and rushed to a plump, white-clad form limply prostrate on the floor beside a mosquito-curtained bed. A sticky scarlet stream was making a sponge of the fallen man's shirt front. Vaguely, North was aware that hundreds of flies had made that buzzing sound which had puzzled him.

Being Hugh North and familiar with the ways of MEKA's hirelings, he forced himself to momentarily ignore the gravely wounded man, and from a shoulder holster produced a compact .32 automatic. With the musty, sickish, sweet odor of fresh blood strong in his nostrils, he quickly examined a big wooden wardrobe, peered into the hallway again, and then cautiously approached the iron-barred window. It was only when a most ordinary vista of smoking chimney pots, red roofs and wireless aerials met his eye that he turned to join Kilgour as he worked over the mahogany-featured little man who had drained such incredible quantities of blood onto room 37's blue and gray tile flooring.

The Cuban had been stabbed in the left side, and, with a sinking heart, the black-haired Intelligence Captain realized that Esteban Santo's last report had found its way into the files of G-2.

"He's trying to talk, but he can't," Kilgour snapped. "Damned shame! Everything was going so well."

"Maybe he can nod," North suggested and bent low. "Did you find out about the shipment?"

Esteban Santos' head inclined ever so slightly, but then his eyes sagged shut so weakly North feared he was gone.

"Let's give him some water."

On crossing to the washstand, Captain North made an interesting discovery. The bowl was half

full of slightly tinted water, and, though two great drops of blue-black ink were on the rim of the basin, the fountain pen or ink bottle which would have created those spots was nowhere to be seen. Moreover, there was a small, bluish smear which indicated that a pen had been hurriedly picked up.

"Queer," North remarked, "you'd think if Santos was going to wash his pen he'd have done it in running water."

Though the anxious American tilted water between the Cuban's lavender-tinted lips it had no revivifying effect, and North was about to test Santos' pulse to see if there was any earthly use in calling a doctor when he noticed three red hairs clutched between the pudgy, much be-ringed fingers of the dying agent. Tight-lipped, he carefully extracted these and slipped them into an envelope, while Kilgour, snatching a pillow from the bed, thrust it beneath Santos' head and shoulders. It was thus that the grimly intent Intelligence officers came upon the third clue; a cloth tobacco pouch which, hideously spotted with blood, had been hidden beneath Esteban Santos' rotund form.

The noise of light, hurrying footfalls on the tiles of the corridor gave North no time to examine this most promising of the clues, so he hurriedly swathed it in a handkerchief and slid it into a side pocket of his white linen coat. Then he stepped quietly behind the door, while Kilgour took post behind the big wardrobe.

A faint knock sounded, and then the door to 37 swung inward to reveal, poised on the threshold, one of the prettiest girls Hugh North had ever beheld.

Sable-haired, but otherwise vivid and colorful as a jungle blossom, this surprising intruder wore a fine black lace mantilla which with her rather full skirt of lemon-tinted organdie, gave her a fragile, old-fashioned air, sharply incongruous to this brutal setting.

Captain North, ever conscious of General Fitz-Amber's dismal forebodings read on her heavily powdered features the transition from horror to fear. Uttering a frightened gasp when she beheld North's rangy figure standing behind the door, the intruder started to retreat.

"Quiet!" North's command flicked out like a whip. "Ah Dios!" The girl shrank back, her big eyes becoming simply enormous as she faltered in Spanish, "What have you done to my poor Esteban?"

Impulsively, she turned again, and in a single, lithe motion flung herself on her knees beside the prostrate Cuban. Red and yellow—Spanish colors, indeed, North reflected, even though he

was witnessing Esteban Santos' frantic efforts to speak.

The stricken agent's head actually raised itself from the pillow, and, though his purplish lips moved, no sound came forth as he peered steadfastly up into the lovely, pale face above him. As in despair, his eyes wavered over to Captain North, but even as that deeply intrigued individual bent low, there came a final rush of blood, and Señor Esteban Santos' body crumpled into the incredible flatness of the newly dead.

With him, North bitterly realized, fled all hope of a quick termination of his struggle to save several thousand lives from dreadful extinction.

At Santos' death the girl moaned, stiffened, and then glared up with terrible malevolence at the two tall and silent Northerns standing above her.

"God's eternal curse on you, you Gringo butchers! *Ay de mi!* My poor boy! My poor Esteban! Ah-h, come back to your Manuela!"

"You've made a very natural mistake, Señorita," Kilgour crisply informed her. "We are the last people who'd want to kill your friend."

"Ah! Don't try to lie to me, *bribón.*" The girl in yellow suddenly sprang to her feet, a quick swirl of her full yellow skirt revealed a blue garter, and then Death nearly entered room 37 for a second time that afternoon.

Like a terrier on a cat, North flung himself at this lovely, raging creature, and, barely in time, wrenched from her hand one of those nickel-plated, pearl-handled affairs that look like toys, but which kill an amazing number of people every year. Before the ferocity of her attack, Kilgour's bony red face went a little pale.

"Control yourself," North snapped in staccato Spanish. "We are friends."

But, like a creature possessed, the girl in the yellow dress writhed in his grasp until Hugh North's face was full of subtly scented hair, and he had, perforce, imprisoned the yielding warmth of her body in his arms.

"Be quiet, *tonta!*" panted Captain North, feeling more than a little ridiculous.

Mercurially, the girl's fury vanished, and the room became so still that very clearly to be heard was the music of a distant dance band playing with unconscious appropriateness the newest *danzón* tune, *"Es Todo yo Quería Saber."*

"I am most sorry, Señores." The dishevelled girl blinked rapidly two or three times. "I—I must have gone a little mad."

North released her, but kept her little pistol.

"Your name, please?"

"Manuela de Macéo y Penalver."

"You are not a Cuban, are you?"

The girl stared, a little frightened, it seemed. "How did you know I was Spanish?"

The smile flashing beneath Captain Hugh North's close-clipped black mustache was an anodyne to suspicion as he said:

"I have traveled in Andalusia. But tell me: Señor Santos was your *novio?*"

A curious personality, this girl—well dressed, but missing real chicness by a narrow margin. With interest, the tall American noted how her soft lips, eloquent of passion, her smooth cheeks and eyelids had been tinted with almost professional skill. But for all that, he reminded himself, smart and wholly reputable women of the Continent are adept at such arts.

"*Sí.* My fiance," cried Manuela de Macéo, her jet eyes abruptly luminous. "Ah, how I loved him! Every night Esteban would come to the café and now—!"

"The café?" Kilgour softly queried as, with a white canvas shoe, he drove away some flies which had settled to explore about that ghastly pool on the tiles.

"*Si,*" she murmured, and swept both men with a look of embarrassment. "Just now I dance at el Tritón—a disgusting little cabaret." Her gracefully rounded shoulders rose in an inimitably Latin shrug. "But one must live, and in these times—" The girl's eyes, very round and troubled, sought North's calm gray ones. "You are of the police, Señores?"

"Not exactly, but we have authority to investigate this sad affair." Smoothly, the Intelligence Captain commenced a campaign to retrieve victory from the rending claws of Defeat. "You know most of Señor Santos' friends?"

The girl in yellow organdie nodded vigorously. "But, yes."

"You don't want to be dragged in on this affair, do you, Señorita?"

She cast him a timid smile. "I really loved Esteban. If it would help you I will run any risk, any disgrace."

"It would help us if you stay out of the case. Where can you be found?"

Curious lights gleamed momentarily at the back of her eyes, then, with characteristic quickness, she crossed to a little writing desk, caught up a sheet of blank paper lying on it, and tore a thin strip off its lowest left-hand corner. Next, from a little gold mesh bag she produced a slim gold pencil and wrote out an address which she handed to the white-clad American.

"I will take this," she caught up the remainder of the sheet, "and if I learn anything I will send you a note at once. Where?"

"To the Central Police Station —under the name of Herbert Nevins."

"*Bueno.*" Earnestly Manuela de Macéo peered into North's bronzed features. "Remember! I will do anything—*anything!* Call on me, I beg of you. Only in revenge will I find a little peace."

In a graceful, birdlike motion this amazing girl bent, kissed North's sinewy brown hand, and was gone in an instant.

"You always were a lady-killer," grinned Kilgour. "Black hair, touch of gray at the temples, and all that."

The flushed American continued to inspect a faint circle of lipstick on his hand. "*She* nearly was a Kilgour killer."

The Englishman sobered instantly. "Yes, hasn't little Manuela a nasty way of jumping at conclusions?"

Grim realities bore in on North's consciousness. Time, irreplacable time, was escaping like quicksilver through his fingers, and, save for three doubtful clues, he was facing as complete a defeat as had ever befallen him.

For all that, he became conscious of the voice of this wickedly gay city, conscious of the gaudy beauty of poinciana blossoms flaming perhaps prophetically red beyond the window bars. If only he were free to wander down those dim, age-old streets, to fling hard-earned dollars away at baccarat and banco, to sample the delights of a daiquiri made by Mario at the Inglaterra.

Firmly, he lashed his brain back into harness.

"Judging by the condition of Santos' inner coat pocket," North remarked, "somebody did a good job at searching. Damn! by now that infernal shipment will be somewhere in the Florida straits, probably cruising right by some of our destroyers. By the way, Bruce, the Navy Department has ordered half a dozen destroyers on patrol off the Guatecatan coast."

"Um! Your people *are* taking this seriously. They'll have to be careful, though; it would raise a nasty set of international complications if your gunboats halt and search *an innocent foreign ship.*

"What do you think we'd better do?" Kilgour demanded, when a hasty but expert search of room 37 revealed nothing at all significant.

"We'll look up Colonel Muñoz of the Secret Police office. When I was here last, he was importing some of the best Viennese apparatus."

"Oh, *Sicherheitsbureau* methods applied to the tobacco pouch, eh?"

"Yes, and to those hairs. Ought to learn something from them."

"Hope so, but what you can find out from three hairs and a tobacco pouch won't checkmate

the gentle machinations of MEKA."

"Maybe not," admitted the dark-haired American, as they closed the door of room 37 and set off to give the alarm. "Still, that pouch has possibilities, since there was no pipe on Santos—and most Cubans don't smoke pipes."

"What do you expect to find out?"

North shrugged. *"Quién sabé?"* said he—which is a good Latin-American shotgun reply.

The sun was plunging into the Caribbean amid a furious crimson glory and distracted telegrams, incomprehensible to all save Captain North, continued to arrive at the Secret Police Bureau which, lodged in an ancient structure dating from the days of the Captains General, frowned upon the raucous traffic of Havana's early night life.

With the strong delicacy of a great surgeon, North's long fingers manipulated an illuminated slide beneath the lenses of the powerful microscope over which he and Colonel Muñoz had labored since four that afternoon. He glanced up as Kilgour entered, his high red forehead creased with an anxious frown. He, too, had been decoding impatient cablegrams from Downing Street.

"Three years I spend in the Vienna laboratories of Professor Hans Gross," Muñoz exclaimed, teeth whitely agleam in his dark, aquiline visage, "and seldom have I seen a more scientific criminologist than our friend, el Capitán Nort'."

"Wouldn't have gotten anywhere without your help on the analysis," came North's characteristic objection. "Well, Colonel, there doesn't seem to be any doubt about that hair now. It's a man's hair, and you were quite right about its having been cut not long ago—I find no perceptible fraying at the terminals.

"That tobacco pouch," he continued, as he rubbed deep-set eyes, "was most interesting, Bruce. Colonel Muñoz and I have agreed about the main data. The man who probably killed Esteban Santos was a red-haired steamship officer of the engine-room staff, taller than average, and probably German."

The British agent blinked incredulously, then cleared his throat. "Oh, I see—you've got a new lead?"

Captain North arose and stretched hugely. "When will you English ever admit there's good in any system but your own? No. We've had nothing but what the microscope told us."

"But all this rot about a steamship engineer?"

North pulled out and lit a stumpy Dunhill pipe. "Rot? Not at all. The minute particles of salt we found in the pouch's

cloth covering didn't leave much room for doubt. Eh, Colonel?"

Colonel Muñoz nodded gravely. "Ah, yes. There was much, ver' much mineral oil and greases also—so the owner is of the engine room—an officer, because the cloth is of an expensive sort. The tobacco was not of a Cuban variety, and so we consulted certain authorities and learned it is of a type ver' popular in Nort' Germany.

"We, of course, phoned the port authority," North continued, "but some twenty ships of all tonnages cleared today. As our suspect, despite the German tobacco, is not necessarily on a German ship, the colonel has sent detectives to the harbor. Every ship applying for clearance tomorrow will be searched. If our ship has already cleared it's—," a shadow darkened North's bronzed features—, "it's just too bad unless something new turns up, and you know, Bruce, how likely that is."

"Rotten shame we found Santos so late. Those munitions can be landed in Guatecata inside of twenty-four hours."

North heaved a long sigh—he was weary and G-2 wasn't being even halfway reasonable. No, it was not reassuring to reflect that what happened here in Havana was squarely up to him—no buck passing, no one to share the blame.

Above everything else the enigma of those ink spots harried him. Why *should* Esteban Santos, during the last few minutes of life, have drawn a basin half full of water and started to pour ink into it? Said ink analytical chemistry had revealed to be nothing even remotely mysterious—only ordinary fountain pen ink.

Still stubbornly assailing his problem, he crossed to a telephone and almost at once heard the slightly husky voice of Manuela de Macéo. Did she know a friend of Esteban who had red hair? North's heart felt like a clenched fist as he awaited the reply. Had he heard the girl catch her breath before she replied?

"*Pero sí*. There—there is indeed such a one."

"I want to talk to him as soon as possible. Can you arrange it?" Loud as surf beating on a reef was the surge of blood in North's ears. Muñoz' and Kilgour's faces were taut as though carved from rawhide.

"I—I will send a *muchacho* with a message to his ship," came the breathless reply. "Unless I phone, Frieder will come to el Tritón for the ten o'clock *tanda*."

"You won't fail me?" North fought to keep his voice an emotional blank.

"I have only to remember Esteban," came the bitter retort. "See that *you* do not fail me!"

Colonel Muñoz, although a busy man, nevertheless made elaborate and regretful excuses

before leaving the two Intelligence officers to stare anxiously at those delicate instruments which from the two clues had raised an ephemeral red-haired murderer.

Ink? Ink! INK! Spelling victory or defeat for the gold-greedy directors of the arms cartel. Ink, spelling life or death for a nation of peaceful Indians.

Suddenly Hugh North's long body stiffened in its rumpled white linen.

"By God, Bruce, I think I've got it! Quick! Where are all the papers from Santos' room?"

All? There were only two or three sheets of stationery on the writing desk. The killer made a pretty clean sweep."

With Kilgour, deeply puzzled, at his heels, North hurried to the laboratory, filled a basin half full of water and into it dropped half the contents of his fountain pen, stirring it until the mixture turned a dim blue hue.

"We'll test it and make sure," said he, and, taking a wooden match stick from a box, proceeded to moisten it in his mouth.

"I say, old lad, you haven't gone balmy?"

"Maybe, Bruce—maybe, but did you know that one of the best invisible inks in the world is made in your own mouth?"

While the strident tooting of taxi horns drifted through the stoutly barred windows, Captain North, using only the saliva-moistened match stick, traced a few quite undiscernible words on a sheet of paper. Next he dried the paper in an electric oven and then hurried over to the wash basin, the sheet fluttering between his fingers.

"This," he explained, "is to see whether we have the solution too strong or too weak. No use experimenting on an original."

So saying, he carefully dipped the sheet on which he had written into the solution, slid it back and forth several times like a photographer developing a film, then replaced the damp sheet in the oven.

"The solution can stand a little more ink," he curtly announced when he had inspected the dried sheet.

Pale blue, but quite readable, the sentence he had written stood out. *"There will be grave danger at el Tritón."*

"Remarkable," Kilgour drawled. "What is the principle?"

"The saliva disturbs minute surface particles of the paper," North explained. "Water will do almost as well. Now we'll test those sheets of paper from Santos' room."

North's rekindled hope sank to pale embers when all the paper from Santos' room remained barren and the Intelligence Captain's brows had contracted into a single line, when over his face came the exasperated look of a man who

suddenly recalls that he has left the theater tickets at home. Instantly the expression vanished.

"If the red-haired chap hasn't poor Santos' message on him—do you think Colonel Muñoz can get us authority to board the blighter's ship?"

"If the engineer hombre shows up, we won't have to worry about that." North commenced pulling on his coat. "And now, Bruce, my boy, I think there's time for us to drop in at *el Lobo Romano* and see if they're still serving their justly famous *pescado papillot.*"

It was a rather somber Hugh North who, with his companion, strode down the malodorous Calle Padre Varila and shortly turned into a noisome alley so narrow that by raising his arms Bruce Kilgour could have touched both walls. Here slatterns inhabiting squalid *viviendas* raucously exchanged gossip, and naked children quarreled with mangy mongrels over scraps of food. Chinese, Negroes, and human derelicts of all sorts shambled by, predatory eyes alert.

"Certainly raise some four-cornered stinks around here," grunted North.

"Rather," Kilgour replied. "But why the devil wouldn't you let Muñoz send along a couple of his secret police?"

"Too risky. We've got to take a look at Manuela's red-haired friend. He doesn't know us, but he might recognize a Cuban fly-cop and not show up. *Entiende?*"

"That's all I wanted to know," Kilgour grinned and hummed a few bars of that haunting *danzón.*

Grimy, smoky, and redolent of many generations of unwashed patrons, the Cafe el Tritón was neither large nor small, but perhaps because of its outrageous tawdriness it somehow fascinated the dark-haired American. As they entered, a mulatto musician with bright, weasel-like eyes experimentally swung his *maracas*—gourds filled with seeds—and made them hiss like a thousand snakes. Another mestizo, darker than his fellows, began to rub a hand drum with enormous pink thumbs.

North was amused to see how promptly the British agent noted the various exits, how firmly he insisted upon a table located in a corner and conveniently near to a side door. Kilgour's caution was justified, for the polyglot clientele crowding around a bar which occupied one whole side of the room was chiefly composed of semi-drunken merchant marine officers, cadets, and also several pleasant-mannered gentlemen who would, for a mere twenty pesos, dispatch to his eternal reward anyone a man might mention. Needless to say, there were also present swarms of shrill-voiced demi-mondaines of

every age and condition—French, American, German and Spanish.

The leader of the orchestra made a clicking noise with his claves, sticks rather resembling an end man's "bones," and struck up a *danzón,* that dance which, originating on the African river Oldan, has flowed westward through the centuries to become a dance irresistibly rhythmic and sensual.

Every perception keyed to its highest efficiency, North studied the shifting panorama, caught the flash of teeth in dark faces, glimpsed quivering thighs, close-locked bodies, and smelt the provocative sting of strong perfumes.

Manuela de Macéo was at his table before he quite realized it. So clean and fresh did the Spanish girl look in her vivid green and white shawl that she made all the other women look like vegetables in a boiled dinner.

"My number comes on next," she murmured hastily. "Mr. Freider will come any minute—so be careful. Afterwards I will bring him to your table, and then, Señores, remember Esteban Santos!"

Before North could utter a word of thanks the Macéo girl had vanished through a curtain veiling a door to the right.

Presently the gaunt American halted a perspiring *mozo* and significantly held up a silver peso. "I wish to take some flowers to the dressing room of Señorita Macéo after her dance."

Mopping his forehead on the cuff of a grimy jacket, the waiter raised his voice over the barbaric clatter of the orchestra now busy playing the ever popular "That's All I Wanted to Know."

"Pass through that curtained door and turn down the corridor to the right. Señorita's dressing room is the second on your left. But, señor, she never receives gentlemen in there."

"That will be my worry." North grinned and passed over the *peso.*

Ten interminable minutes later Kilgour, sipping unenthusiastically at a wretchedly poor highball, clutched North's wrist and peered intently through the swirling miasma of tobacco smoke.

"See him?"

The American nodded; his alert gray eyes had already fixed themselves on a not unhandsome and powerfully built individual who stood negligently in the café's entrance with the tarnished buttons of his blue serge officer's coat casting back dim reflections.

Captain North's heart became a hard rubber ball that bounded wildly around inside his ribs when, after making an excuse to Kilgour, he arose, and, under the pretext of buying a panatela at the bar, walked slowly by the red-haired officer. When he came back there was a curious tautness

to his features and excited flashes played at the back of his eyes.

"Seen him before?" Kilgour muttered.

"No. Big brute, though. Arms like a gorilla."

"German?"

"Can't tell. But he's not English or American."

A fat little master of ceremonies now appeared and with many elaborate gestures announced that La Macéo, famous the world over, would presently dance the *cumdavle.*

"Ay! The *cumdavle!*" "Watch this, Pablo." "Ho, the cumdavle!" Necks were craned, chairs were shifted and shabby waiters hurried to complete their orders.

"Compared to the *cumvadle,* the rumba is a minuet," North commented, his eyes still fixed on the square-faced officer across the room. "Ought to be worth watching. And now, Bruce," his voice sank, "no arguments. I'm going out. Stay quiet until I come back, or a fight begins. If there's trouble, get out *as fast as you can!* We'll meet at the Bureau."

Kilgour, looking distinctly troubled but knowing his Hugh North, nodded just as a thunderous clamor arose from the hand drums. A limelight spluttered on, and out onto the dance floor whirled the girl who, that afternoon had crouched sobbing above Esteban Santos' bloodied corpse.

Manuela's figure was superb in a skintight rumba costume of white with an outrageously low-cut bodice. Her long and shapely legs were sheathed in very sheer scarlet stockings which, secured by elaborate white silk and rhinestone garters, ended a good six inches below some frilled dancing tights. Instead of the usual handkerchief, Manuela flaunted a fan made of flaming macaw feathers that matched her stockings. The effect was electric, and in all the café there was not a sound save the whine of the violins, the swish of the *maracas,* the clatter of the *claves,* and the nerve-quickening rumble of the hand drums. Manuela, all smiles and laughter, writhed into the opening steps of her fantastic dance.

It was only with difficulty that North tore his eyes away and so watched the red-haired officer staring at the dancer in rapt fascination; also he saw a remarkable display of primitive emotions written on the loosened lips of the hard-faced crew on all sides.

Quicker, more barbaric, more insinuating sounded the banging of the drums when Manuela, great eyes asparkle, paused in the center of the floor and, separating her feet, commenced to perform undulating contortions evolved in the steaming jungles of Haiti. Gradually the maddening tempo increased until even

the hard-worked waiters were swaying and tapping tired feet.

A sibilant sigh circled the room when the sable-haired enchantress suddenly gathered her skirts high above her knees and prepared for the second phase of the *cumdavle.* Like a white pillar swaying seductively amid the smoke, Manuela de Macéo held every eye so firmly that only Kilgour noticed North circle back of the tables and disappear through the curtained door leading to Manuela's dressing room.

The corridor, reeking of cheap perfume and plastered with fly-blown notices of long-forgotten acts, led toward a series of doors. A half-dressed actress was smoking in the nearest of the stuffy little dressing rooms, but the second one was empty, and there, hanging from a peg, was the mantilla of Manuela de Macéo.

His face a bronze mask of subdued anxiety, North closed the door behind him, then skirted a chair hung with fragile garments to furiously examine the cosmetic-littered dressing table.

"Damn!" He flung aside the gold mesh handbag and renewed his search by testing the pockets of a smartly tailored sport coat. No luck! The wild throbbing of those near-by drums was not louder than the beat of North's heart. Had he miscalculated?

Flying fingers, e x p e r t at search, felt a trio of hats, then hastily examined three pairs of tiny dancing shoes. Still no luck! And the music was reaching a crescendo! He had failed—and MEKA would win.

Smothering a g r o a n, he straightened, lit a cigarette, and was calmly seated at Manuela's dressing table when she burst in, black eyes aflame and rounded breasts still aheave from exertion. Intently he watched her eyes and caught their involuntary flicker to the right of the cosmetic table behind him. Then, relaxing somewhat and with slender hips asway, Manuela advanced, a puzzled smile on her lips.

"Why did you come in here?" she demanded. "The red-haired man is outside."

"Frightfully sorry." Smiling, North got to his feet, and his narrow dark head barely cleared the ceiling. "I couldn't watch your dance and think, too."

"Gracias." Manuela stepped close, and reaching behind her, apparently undid some of her costume. "You will have to go now."

Captain North nodded and started to turn, but flung himself violently back when, with the speed of an arrow, Manuela expertly lunged at his armpit where the glittering six inches of her knife would have found the easiest possible entrance to his heart. For so big a man Hugh North was amazingly quick, and in an instant he held her with one hand clapped over those satin red lips.

Manuela de Macéo fought like a starved tigress—kicking, writhing, scratching and trying to sink strong white teeth into the muffling palm; her struggles were quite futile. A chair and a stool went crashing over, but now the girl's surprisingly strong young body was forced to the dirty floor, and North knelt upon her shoulder blades, pinning her flat, and so momentarily freed a hand without permitting an outcry.

Had that instinctive glance told him what he wanted to know? Did what he so earnestly sought lie in the big powder box on the right of her dressing table? No telling. She was such a superb actress—quite worthy of MEKA'S high standards.

His fingers, fumbling amid the flaky substance, caught the edge of something, and a small blizzard of powder particles whirled out over the room, but just then the dancer heaved frantically and succeeded in wrenching her mouth free from his silencing hand.

"Ayuda! Aquí!"

"Mil gracias." North flung over his shoulder as he bounded for the door.

A waiter and two sinister individuals were rushing down the corridor. North leaped to meet them, and his fist caught the foremost man flush on the point of the jaw, so that he fell, tripping the waiter who was immediately behind. The third man whipped out a pistol, and on his neck North felt the heat of the discharge as he ducked and butted the gunman for all the world like a Paris apache.

Bedlam broke out in el Tritón when North broke out into the street.

"Ladrón!" "Thief!" "Stop thief!" Out of the front door raced a torrent of menacing figures, but Captain North was well away, the powdered square of paper in his pocket.

* * * * * *

"But I still can't understand why you so quickly lost interest in that red-haired Johnnie," Kilgour persisted when North, back at Police Headquarters, once more prepared the ink-and-water-bath.

"For two reasons. Those hairs came from a red-headed person all right, but they were from a beard, and Mr. Frieder had none. Moreover, he wasn't freshly shaved.

"Thought he might have removed the beard since this afternoon, so I went over to look. And second, our man's hair was a shade or two darker than the decoy dear little Manuela found for us."

"Think Frieder's one of the MEKA crowd?" Kilgour demanded.

"Hardly—more likely he's just a conveniently red-haired friend of Manuela's. We'll find out for

sure, if the police pick her up. No, Bruce, the man we want is probably miles out to sea. I think he was Eichorn, von Zastrow's chief roughneck, and I'm rather looking forward to meeting him aboard one of our destroyers tomorrow sometime."

The American intently scanned the same blank sheet of paper from which Manuela de Macéo had torn the slip for her address, and then, every nerve strumming like a banjo string, he immersed the sheet which had so nearly cost him his life; to him came the exquisite anguish of a gambler for enormous stakes awaiting the turn of a decisive card.

"Those ink spots, Bruce, have troubled me all along. I simply can't account for them any other way; I was incredibly stupid not to have guessed what was up when Manuela so cleverly stowed *the rest of that blank sheet in her purse!* Eichorn must have overlooked it. Quite an actress, that girl. She had me fooled for a while."

As the two waited for the sheet to dry, Captain North lit a cigarette. Uninterrupted, the night life of Havana, now in full blast, sounded its own peculiar obbligato.

"Well, Bruce." North's hand trembled just a little as he opened the oven door. What if he had been fooled—what if this was not the original? His mouth became a tight and colorless slash. North held the torn sheet to the light.

"By God!" Kilgour burst out. "There *is* something on it!"

Hurriedly scrawled in Spanish was the following message:

Nov. 10, 1933
S. S. TRINIDAD.

ESTEBAN:

MEKA shipment came aboard last night. Will transship to S. S. Cumana at rendezvous, Lat. 16° 30 min. N. Long. 83° 15 min. W. We sail 4 p.m. today.

PABLO.

"Ah! I wondered why Manuela kept the rest of the sheet she gave you her address on," commented Bruce Kilgour. "Fancy she wanted to blackmail Pablo—whoever he is."

"Shouldn't wonder," grunted the American as he made a translation.

"Neat work, Hugh, for a man starting from scratch this afternoon with nothing but three clues and a corpse."

"Lat. 16° 30 min. N. and Long. 83° 15 min. W.," North repeated as his pencil flashed on to encode divers radiograms which would send those waiting destroyers southward.

As he worked, Captain Hugh North pursed his lips and perhaps unconsciously began to whistle the air of that haunting *danzón* entitled, "That's All I Wanted to Know."

—Continued From Back Cover

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